

THE ROMANCE OF BAYARD

THE ROMANCE OF BAYARD

BY

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"TWO WORLDS," "LOUIS XI. AND CHARLES THE BOLD,"

"SIDELIGHTS ON THE COURT OF FRANCE," ETC., ETC.

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TO THE READER

WHILE the characters who figure in this romance are all historical, the war scenes depicted in the story of that wonderful hero, the Seigneur de Bayard, are mostly authentic.

ANDREW HAGGARD



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THE ROMANCE OF BAYARD

CHAPTER I

THE FIELD OF THE CLOTH OF GOLD

THE blazing sun was shining upon such a scene of magnificence as the world had hitherto never beheld.

In the centre of a circle formed of three hundred tents of gold and silver, shone the splendid marquee of the young King François I., which was surmounted by a golden statue of Saint Michael. In an immense saloon of this tent, hung with rich silks and velvets and gorgeous banners emblazoned with the arms of France, a numerous and richly attired company was assembled. A banquet was in progress, and while many knights and ladies were dining at separate small tables placed around the borders of the marquee, the centre was occupied by a large round table, loaded with golden cups and ornaments of the richest design.

At this table were seated an assemblage of Kings, Queens, Princes and Princesses, Cardinals and ladies of high degree. The noblest of France and England were feasting at the board, round which the wine-cup had been circling freely, as was evident from the flushed faces of the noble seigneurs, the sparkling eyes and lively sallies of the ladies.

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Among these latter, two were especially remarkable, not only for the splendour and tastefulness of their attire but for their great beauty. These were Marguerite d'Angoulême, Duchesse d'Alençon, the sister of François I., and Françoise de Foix, Comtesse de Châteaubriand, his mistress—indeed, as many said, the young Comtesse was not only the mistress of the King but the master of the whole French Court, where her sway was almost supreme, in spite of the jealousy of the King's mother, Louise de Savoie, Duchesse d'Angoulême.

From the good humour shining in the faces of all present, it would have seemed to an onlooker as if all the distrust between France and England, which even throughout the opening week of that glorious meeting of the Cloth of Gold it had been the business of the rival Cardinals Du Prat and Wolsey to keep alive, were now a thing of the past. Upon that very morn, oblivious of all ceremony and etiquette, King François had ridden over almost unattended to the Castle of Guines, hard by Calais, where King Henry VIII. was lodging, surrounded by his army and with the gates protected by as numerous a guard as though suspecting an attack from a hostile host.

The young Monarch, who had kept late hours overnight, was yet abed when the officer of the guard in the turret commanding the moat, of which the drawbridge was raised, was surprised by the clarion of a horseman sounding a merry hunting air. To his astonishment he beheld the King of France himself, blowing lustily into a huge hunting horn which encircled his body.

"Holà! Messieurs les Anglais!" cried François merrily, "be on your guard, for I have come to visit you on English ground in order to take you and your King prisoners. Lower the drawbridge, and lead me to His Grace at once, for I warn you that all resistance is useless."

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Undeterred by the information that His Grace of England yet slept, François insisted that he himself would act as valet and call him, which, after having armed himself with a jug of hot water, he proceeded to do, forcing the Court officials to conduct him straight to the Royal sleeping apartment, which he proceeded to enter without ceremony.

The farce was continued by his throwing a chain of gold around the neck of the sleeping English King and thus effecting his capture, and the result of the merry jest was that the two Kings, whom the Cardinals, their Chancellors, had hitherto kept at arm's length, had met for the first time with a friendship that was not simulated.

The events of the morning's escapade, which had brought real pleasure to all in both the French and English camps save to the two plotting Cardinals, had been well laughed over by the distinguished company round the sumptuous board. Even that decorous and religious Queen, Catherine of Aragon, who but rarely condescended to see the point of a joke and ever loved etiquette, had been delighted at the jest, from the mere fact that the barrier hitherto raised between the Kings by the Cardinals had been broken down. There now seemed to all the prospect of a treaty of peace which was to be lasting being signed, in spite of the efforts of all interested parties, including Catherine's nephew, the twenty-year-old Emperor Charles V., to keep France and England at variance.

Jousting had been going on all the morning in the adjacent lists, which were bounded at the ends by trees with leaves of green silk, having trunks of gold and branches of silver, and naturally therefore the conversation at the round table drifted to a discussion of the tilting matches that had taken place, and the feats of arms that had been witnessed.

The French knights had been in the main

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victorious during the tournament, a circumstance which rather rankled in the heart of the already somewhat massive Henry VIII., although the only way in which he had shewn his rancour had been to ride so furiously at a French knight, his opponent on the previous day, that he had killed him by breaking his neck, when he had stricken the unfortunate man on the helm with his blunted spear.

This circumstance was somewhat mischievously referred to by Françoise de Châteaubriand. This young lady was of the semi-Royal family of De Foix, was descended from Madeleine, the daughter of Charles VII. of France, and was the first cousin of Henri d'Albret, the ruling King of Navarre. Therefore, in spite of her known relations with King François, much as Madame Louise the King's mother would have liked to exclude her, Françoise was entitled by her birth and lineage to a seat at the Royal table. Taking advantage of a lull in the conversation she pointedly addressed "Madame," by which title the still young and flighty mother of François was always known, and while thinking no doubt to flatter Henry VIII., observed :

"His Grace of England has a terribly strong arm, Madame, did you notice how he felled that unfortunate Champdivers yesterday? I doubt if you have any knight in all your native Savoy with such a doughty arm. Even here in France we should find it difficult to match His Grace." Françoise spoke thus, well knowing that it had been decided that the Kings of France and England were not to be allowed to tilt together, but Madame, who never could command her temper, was drawn at once, as the saucy Comtesse had intended that she should be.

In a voice shrill with anger, she replied witheringly : "I think that the Comtesse de Châteaubriand knows more of bedchamber furniture than she does of fields of honour ! Has she perchance never heard

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of a certain knight named Bayard in the service of my brother the Duke Charles III.? If not, I would inform her ladyship that the said knight, alone and single-handed, would be capable of vanquishing her three brothers, André de Foix, Seigneur de Lesparre, Thomas de Foix, Seigneur de Lescun, and Odet de Foix, Seigneur de Lautrec, all of whom my son the King has advanced far beyond their merits." The Comtesse flushed crimson, and her glorious dark southern eyes flashed fire, as she replied sarcastically :

"Had not Madame better add the names of Gaston de Foix, the hero of Ravenna, Jean de Foix, Vicomte de Narbonne, and of a few other relatives of King François and mine to the list?— Monseigneur the Constable de Bourbon for instance! Or perhaps he could not be spared so easily," she added slyly, glancing saucily across at the Duc Charles de Montpensier-Bourbon as she spoke. This was a shrewd thrust, as Louise was openly in love with the Constable, to whom she even declared herself affianced, and had given a golden ring.

Bourbon, who met the eye of the Comtesse, nearly laughed at her, as if to encourage her in her baiting of the King's mother, in whose absurd passion for himself he had acquiesced for some years past, even when his humpbacked wife Suzanne was alive. Now he was fatigued with the inordinate love of a woman considerably his senior, and the more so because he was in love with her daughter, the Princess Marguerite, the Duchesse d'Alençon. He did not, however, dare to do more than laugh covertly, the Queen-Mother, as Madame was also called although she had never been a Queen, was obviously in too much of a rage for him to intervene.

Marguerite, however, did so, hurriedly, she was horrified at this scene, which was one to which she was not unaccustomed, commencing thus

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before strangers, and the more so as she noticed that Cardinal Wolsey and his master were looking at one another and smiling ironically.

"My mother," she remarked, "tell us something about this Bayard. We have all heard of him, of course, in a general way, but no particulars. He is not really a Savoyard is he? and is he so very brave and very strong?"

"He is the knight who is called *sans peur et sans reproche*," replied her mother, "and I claim him for Savoy—but ask your brother the King, for he knows as much about him as any one. François, is not Bayard a Savoyard, pray tell us?"

"He is by birth a Frenchman from Dauphiné, and therefore by rights our subject," answered François, "although, like many of the Delphinois, likely enough he still keeps up the farce that Dauphiné has never been rightly annexed to the French domains—but that is a mere detail. That which is true is that he is a very gallant fellow and a soldier of fortune who gives his fortune to others. He ought to be a knight-errant, roaming about the world to redress the wrongs of maidens in distress, for those alone are the class of maidens that interest him—he never looks at a woman. Incidentally, I may mention that it was at his hands that I received the honour of knighthood."

"I have heard of that, Brother France," interrupted King Henry. "It was at the battle of Marignano, your first combat near Milan, five years ago when you were but a boy. He dubbed you knight among the dead and dying, and Bayard, if the chroniclers speak truly, did a good deal towards helping you and your cousin the Constable yonder to defeat the Swiss during the two days' fighting. Oh, his reputation is world-wide!"

After this remark there was a pause in the conversation, for François, vainglorious by nature, if brave, always chose to maintain that it was by his

own prowess alone that the battle of Marignano had been won, whereas the Constable de Bourbon, a really able general, was well aware that had it not been for his own dispositions it must have been lost.

The Comtesse broke the silence. "Can nobody tell us anything more about this knight of whom Madame boasts so much and who is, it seems, not a Savoyard after all? Up to the present we have only heard that he dubbed the King a knight, and is afraid to look a woman in the face unless she be, like Niobe, bathed in tears, when he will kindly take her under his wing. Has the man got no brains, or is he merely a sort of good-humoured buffalo, with brute strength but nothing else?"

"A buffalo? say rather a good-humoured lion with the cunning of a fox," laughed the old Maréchal La Trémouille disdainfully. "Although he has not half my age, I can well remember the time when I wished that I had but half his wits. When he got away from the late Emperor Maximilian and His Grace of England yonder, for instance, without paying his ransom and yet with his honour intact. I was a prisoner also, but not being his equal in brains had to pay my shot before they would let me go. And a heavy one it was too!" the old General added ruefully, with a grimace which made all at the table laugh.

"Tell us the story, Maréchal La Trémouille," cried the Princess Marguerite gaily. "Anything about a knight who is also a buffalo, a lion and a fox, must be at least as interesting as one of Æsop's fables."

"Nay, nay, Madame d'Alençon," replied the Maréchal, "you had better ask His Grace of England; he knows the facts better than I do."

"Ay, prithee relate to us the incident, Brother England," said François. "There are many marvellous stories afloat concerning the gallantry of this young chevalier that we have heard, apart from those that have come under our own notice. But

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they have come to us from friendly sources and hence we hesitate to believe them all, far less to repeat them, whereas Your Grace, if we mistake not, has met this Bayard in the open field in the time of our cousin, the late King Louis XII. Were the circumstances of sufficient interest to bear repeating?"

Henry VIII. threw back his handsome head, a broad smile spread over his ruddy cheek, and then he broke into a jovial laugh.

"Interesting enough for us, by Saint George! upon the first occasion at all events, for he frightened us out of our wits. 'Twas, before your accession some seven years ago, when we had descended into Artois. We had twelve thousand foot soldiers with us, but never a mounted man, when, one day near Théroutanne, this Captain Bayard with his own troop of men-at-arms all splendidly mounted, came upon us. He was accompanied by another seigneur with his troop, and noble looking gentlemen they were likewise, by my troth! but, all told, the two companies of men-at-arms were but few in number.

"The Captain Bayard, having espied us in the midst of our men, rode up to parley, and, dismounting, with great courtesy bowed lowly, and requested speech of us, which we accorded him."

"And what said he then?" enquired the Princess Marguerite. "Methinks the Chevalier was over bold thus to approach Your Liege."

"He loudly announced his name, and then requested us to surrender ourselves into his hands, adding, Gadzooks! that, an we would not do so, it would be his painful duty to take us—alive or dead. The merry varlet added that he could have charged us sudden from a wood without our knowledge, but that it had not seemed to him a knightly action so to do; that, moreover, 'twas against his conscience thus to attack without giving his foemen time to commend themselves to God." Henry paused and drank a cup of wine.

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"In truth, I am now ashamed, Madame," said the Comtesse to Louise, "that I called your Chevalier a buffalo so lightly. Forgive me, I pray, but Sire, what next? What said you to this gallant gentleman, be he of Savoy or Dauphiné?"

"We said that we thanked him for his courtesy, but that, God willing, we would defend ourselves. He saluted, mounted his horse and rode back to head his troop, whom presently we saw prepared, with lance in rest, to charge. 'Twas then our danger came, although the gallant Bayard knew it not, as our front ranks, which we advanced, stood firmly stationed on a hill, and feared to turn their backs. But meanwhile all those of ours below the crest, affrighted at the very name of Bayard, incontinently fled, across a valley to a coppice wood beyond, leaving us almost unprotected." After another sup, the King continued: "But Bayard did not charge, or he ere now might well have earned a king's ransom for those varied charities to which they say he freely gives."

"Why did he not charge, Your Grace," exclaimed Marguerite, who, as all else, had been listening breathlessly to the King of England's story.

"God's truth! 'twas not his fault, it was his comrade left him—one Seigneur de Piennes. We learned the craven fellow's name later. We saw him pull the Captain Bayard by the sleeve, could hear him expostulate, beg him to desist. When he would not listen, this dastardly comrade ordered his men-at-arms to wheel about, and retired at a trot. Bayard, however, stood, and calling out to us he was disgraced, bade us advance and take him if we could. He said that he would not retire, nor, since he now could not make good his word to charge, would he die dishonoured, but stand his ground and fight at any odds.

"And there we stood till nightfall—and then we turned our backs and left him thus, still standing

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with his gallant company—well, here's a bumper to his health!"

King Henry ceased, and as he did so murmurs of approval of the conduct of the gallant Bayard arose on all sides. In these the mild-eyed Claude, the Queen of France, and Catherine of Aragon both joined as though of one race. "Our father, King Louis XII., always spoke well of him," remarked the former; "yet for some reason never advanced him greatly. Perchance it was his youth he found against him. And yet, before our father's time, when our Royal cousin, King Charles VIII., led his arms from Italy, 'twas Bayard, then a very boy, as we have heard, who rescued him from overpowering odds amid the terrible carnage of the battle of Fornovo. Was it not so, La Trémouille? you should know the facts."

"Ay, Madame, 'tis truth indeed, for I was there and saw it all. The mere lad, as then indeed he was, tore the King from the men-at-arms of the Duke of Mantua, cut him an opening through the press and, bearing the Duke's own standard as a trophy, brought the King through to safety. The army was astounded at his deeds, and when the King rewarded him with five hundred crowns in gold, young Bayard kept not one sol himself but gave the money to his company."

"Who all were gallant gentlemen of Savoy," interposed Madame Louise, "who served the Duke for love of glory, not for pay nor yet for pillage, that they might cover themselves with gold and gewgaws, as do some foppish fools who dwell within our Court to-day."

As Madame scathingly uttered these crushing words, she looked meaningly at her son's favourite, Bonnivet, the Admiral of France, a handsome, dissolute young spark, covered with gems and scented like a woman. Louise hated Bonnivet, because he never lost a chance of thwarting the

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plans of her beloved Bourbon, and this hatred was an extra thorn in François' side. The King of France was indeed for ever being called upon to intervene, to quell the quarrels raised within his Court, which arose from his mother's hatred of his fair mistress on the one side, and of his male favourite on the other. To make things worse, no love was lost between the Comtesse and the Admiral. Had they but had the wisdom to combine forces against his hot and foolish mother and her unwilling fiancé the Constable, as the King complained, there might have been more chance of peace where now all was dissension.

Upon this occasion Bonnivet was not long in taking up the cudgels, but, in an insolent manner, retorted :

"The soldiers of Savoy serve not, methinks, for gold only because the beggarly mountainous country possesses none. That is why its soldiers—this much vaunted Bayard for instance—are ever found serving under other flags. But are they ever faithful to one leader long? Do they not chop and turn with every change of the wind? The Emperor is their master one day, the Duke of Milan or he of Mantua another, the King of France a third. 'Tis no wonder they are looked upon as spies in every army. Madame," continued Bonnivet, turning to Queen Claude, "perchance that is the reason this man we hear so much of has never risen to any high command. Is there a realm of Europe, a Duchy or a State save that of England, beneath whose banners he has not served in turn, yet all the time remained the man of Savoy? I say, that which others may well have said : perchance he is the spy of Savoy, and as such dear to the ruler of that Duchy, and to that ruler's sister." Bonnivet bowed impertinently to the King's mother, then leisurely commenced to pick his teeth with a golden and jewelled toothpick.

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Madame, with furiously blazing eyes, sprang to her feet. She called Bonnivet an insolent fop, and then loudly appealed to her son for his protection from "his scented darling."

There was now consternation depicted on the countenances of the English visitors of high degree, all of whom, with their French convives, had risen from their own little tables and, forming a circle at a distance from the Royal board, were listening to the conversation. "What," thought they, "will the King of France do now?—will he order the man who has thus insulted his mother to be placed under arrest?"

They little knew their François I., who was secretly glad to see his mother insulted so long as his favourite was the one who had outraged her feelings.

He merely laughed and good-naturedly bade Bonnivet to talk about subjects with which he was better acquainted, and then begged his mother courteously to forgive the Admiral his ignorance. As Madame resumed her seat, he turned to King Henry.

"Brother England," he remarked, "Your Grace hath heard what hath been said, and yet methinks yourself have somewhat more that you could tell us of the knight the subject of this hot discussion. You have met him more than once, you said, but now? What was that story of his ransom, when Bayard played the fox and not the lion?"

"He played the lion first though, with some fifteen more holding a bridge at the Battle of the Spurs when all the rest of France's chivalry had, moved by sudden panic, fled. Forgive my mentioning the circumstance, such sudden scares will oft occur in war and to the boldest men, especially when mounted. The man on foot will stop to breathe and turn to face his foe, the horseman oft in vain would stay the horse. Each charger

gains contagion from his mate and flies in wild stampede, carrying his unwilling rider with him. 'Tis thus that these things happen, Madame," added Henry, turning to the Princess Marguerite, "you must not, therefore, blame the man-at-arms, who would, but cannot, stay."

"We thank Your Liege for your most courteous explanation and excuse of that which will, alas! ever remain a blot upon the chivalry of France. Yet Bayard stayed! and others with him!"

"Ay, that he did—the Chevalier rallied the others at the bridge, and for two hours kept back all our men and those of our then ally the Emperor Maximilian. 'Twas only when we crossed the river and got behind him in force, that he determined to yield to those in front. A clever dog! He managed affairs nicely, so that even in becoming our prisoner he was not our prisoner; so that, much as we would have liked to have kept him with us, we had to let him go. Spy or no spy"—and Henry glanced at Bonnivet—"we would we had such knights in our employ."

"Your Liege speaks in paradoxes," here interrupted the saturnine Constable de Bourbon with a scowl. For this great Duke, the First Prince of the Blood Royal of France, had heard that Henry had recommended François to behead him, if merely on account of his haughty bearing. "I have seen much of war," he added sneeringly, "and never yet heard of a prisoner who was no prisoner!"

"Then have you yet somewhat of war to learn, Monseigneur," answered Henry sarcastically, "yet such was the case. Before yielding, the Captain Bayard overthrew one of the Burgundian captains in our service. With his sword to his throat, he forced him to yield himself and to surrender his weapons. Then he surrendered himself to the Burgundian in turn; and thus they came to our camp, each being the prisoner of the other! They

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shared the same tent for a day, while Bayard rested, and then he calmly said he wished to go, inaction wearied him!

“‘But your ransom?’ quoth our Burgundian captain.

“‘But your own, which must be paid first,’ responded the Chevalier!

“They brought him to us, but we were unable to decide the matter, but begged Bayard to settle the case by entering our service, and offered him high command.”

“Which offer he declined?” queried Marguerite.

“Ay, did he, but courteously, so then we took him to our gallant uncle, the old Emperor, who laughed right heartily at the imbroglio. He settled the matter by deciding that each should cry quits, and sent Bayard away on parole to his daughter, the Archduchess of Austria, the Regent of the Netherlands, to keep him out of mischief for a time, and study architecture instead of arms.”

CHAPTER II

THE WRESTLING OF THE KINGS

THE subject of Bayard had died a natural death, when the good-natured atmosphere pervading the assemblage at the Royal table was somewhat disturbed by the King of England, who said, in a somewhat provocative manner, in reply to a remark made by François :

“ Ay, marry! Brother France, the chivalry of France and England have shown equal bravery in the lists, yet in some points we have outshone you. In the matter of archery, for instance, you have not been able to hold a candle to us. Come, confess your failure.”

François, who was somewhat heated by wine, flared up at this, and answered rudely : “ We confess that you greatly exceed us in the art of drawing the longbow—an art which we do not envy you.”

As some at the table tittered at this reply, Henry returned hotly :

“ We fail to grasp your meaning, unless it be to own that you and your courtiers are utterly devoid of the first rudiments of shooting; your own attempts are ridiculous—an English woman would do better.”

“ We mean,” replied François, “ merely to infer that we consider your archery a plebeian game, quite unfitted for noble seigneurs to practise. Scarce could we restrain ourselves from laughter this morn to see you swelling yourself out like a bull frog,

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pray be not offended, in your efforts to prove to these fair dames that you, like William Tell of old, could hit an apple or a helmet at one hundred yards. We vow 'twas ludicrous, and know not what your boasted shooting made us think of—a gentleman should wield a lance, archery is for plebeians.”

“Perchance, fair France, it made you think of other fields than this—of those of Crécy, of Poitiers, and Agincourt, whereon archery told its tale, while the clothyard shafts flew right merrily, and the men-at-arms with the lance and sword fell like ripe corn before them. Methinks, that if on those fields there were aught that was ludicrous, it was not the Englishman. Nay, take not offence, Brother François, as you said but now, but mark our words. We say, and are prepared to make it good, that 'tis due to these so-called plebeian sports—archery, boxing, wrestling, in which we of Albion's Isle excel, that we so oft have made you of Gallic stock look foolish in the past. You would do well to cultivate those sports—not scoff at them.”

François was now angry and showed it in his mien, as he replied, while half rising from his seat :

“Carry not, we pray, your longbow with you further, Brother Henry, and speak not of wrestling, for there we are your masters. From King to peasant, there's not a man in France but would throw an Englishmen twice in three matches—ay, with all due courtesy, there can we prove you have not a leg to stand upon.”

Henry laughed scornfully at this, and slapping his large hand upon the table, so as to make all the golden goblets ring, sprang to his feet. He was a noble figure, broad, and full of health and strength, but, like some young bull that had been overfed, he seemed a trifle heavy as he cried a challenge.

“Marry ! we say you prize yourselves too highly. To prove the same, before all these great lords and dames assembled, we dare you to a contest.

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Three bouts ! How say you, will you accept, or fear you to be flung across this table ? ”

“ Boast not, Brother England, pride may have its fall,” answered François, springing nimbly to his feet, and revealing a form of sinewy grace as he flung aside a short mantle from his shoulders. “ Boast not, we say, lest we make you eat your words. We are ready ! ay, let us try three falls, for the honour of France and of Saint Michael.”

All of the company, like the King, had sprung to their feet. While little cries arose from the ladies, who were in a flutter of excitement, the men of the two nations glared angrily at one another. Gradually the company fell back in two groups behind the Kings, who stood facing one another.

Queen Catherine and Queen Claude, however, sought to intervene to prevent the contest. Stepping forward with dignity, the former observed :

“ We pray Your Lieges not to wrestle. In two great monarchs ’twould be most unseemly. My lord of France, if archery be deemed plebeian, although we’ve seen you and your nobles practise it, how much more wrestling ! ’tis but meet for clowns upon a village green. Henry, we beg of you, forbear.”

Queen Claude at the same time plucked at her husband by the sleeve and timidly sought to pull him back without a word—she looked unfeignedly frightened. The Comtesse, however, seeing the angry looks of all around, sought to turn the matter into a jest by remarking :

“ Think, too, Your Lieges, how unhealthy just after dinner, ’tis like to make you both die of indigestion ! ”

At this there was a laugh among the onlookers but the would-be combatants did not join in the merriment, and, while François cried impatiently to Bonnivet to help him off with his pourpoint, Henry himself tore off the short velvet and ermine cape

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which he wore. Turning, he cried, "Hold this, poppet," and flung it to a young and very pretty girl in the crowd behind him. Its folds fell completely over her head. This caused some amusement among the frivolous company—while the Princess Marguerite exclaimed gaily: "What! would His Grace of England make a modern Elisha of our little maid-of-honour, Anne Boleyn? This is, methinks, more serious than the mere throwing of a handkerchief—what says Her Grace of England?"

Catherine of Aragon was not, however, in the humour for jesting just then, and as the blushing girl emerged with touzled locks from beneath the heavy cloak, the pompous tones of Cardinal Wolsey checked the laughter with which the courtiers had received the sly joking of the fair Duchesse d'Alençon.

Advancing between the two Kings, the Cardinal of York remarked in his most grandiloquent manner, his hands, meanwhile, uplifted in holy horror:

"Your Lieges should not indulge in this most foolish contest. 'Tis one, moreover, calculated to endanger the entente cordiale 'twixt France and England. In the name of diplomacy—in the name of Holy Church—I protest!"

King Henry cut him short. "In the name of Satan, cease your prating, Cardinal, and help us out of this hot jewelled surtout, which sits too tightly over their unwholesome dishes. We'll soon lower his French pride for him!"

The great Cardinal's priestly pride was, however, too great for him to condescend to act the part of valet to the monarch whom he ruled. As Wolsey stepped backwards, still fuming and protesting, into the ranks of the courtiers of both sexes behind him, Henry stood furiously endeavouring to divest himself of his garment. As none else, unbidden,

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dared to approach the person of the irate English King, the Princess Marguerite took pity upon him.

"Anne," quoth she to the young English maiden who had, as a child, been left at the French Court by Mary Tudor, the widow of Louis XII., "wherefore help you not His Grace of England? Since you are his subject and he hath appointed you his cloak-bearer, it is your bounden duty. Hurry, my child—your fingers are nimble enough with hooks and eyes, as I know well, since I give you plenty practice."

"Ay, Madame, but not with buttons! I am not accustomed to undressing men—I would say males—much less Majesties!" replied the daughter of Sir Thomas Boleyn, saucily. "Still, if His Grace of England is really unable to disrobe alone," and she advanced and made a low curtsy to King Henry, "I will try to learn about buttons."

"Ay, help us, poppet, help! 'twill be good practice for thee for the future!" exclaimed the King jocularly—whereupon the young girl assisted the twenty-eight-year-old King out of his garment deftly enough.

As Anne retired, bearing the jewelled surtout, King François cried to the Constable: "Now, my fair cousin of Bourbon, form us a ring and act as arbiter."

It was with some difficulty, however, that the Constable was able to make all the Queens, Princesses, ladies, Cardinals and seigneurs stand back in a circle. All were so anxious to have a good view of a wrestling match between two of the greatest potentates in Christendom, that they pushed forward like a lot of unruly schoolboys.

All this time the two Sovereigns stood face to face, eyeing one another; but at length, the ring being properly formed, Bourbon gave the word to close.

In a second the Kings had their arms round each

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other's bodies, Henry, by securing the lower grip, having apparently a slight advantage over his slimmer adversary.

Then began a famous tussle, in which each sought to throw the other by the exercise of sheer strength and no tricky devices. This way and that way the pair swayed, but it was evident for a time that they were evenly matched. Backwards and forwards they went, round and round they spun. On several occasions Henry lifted François for a fraction of a second from the ground ; many times François had Henry with only one toe touching the floor. Both began to pant laboriously and the perspiration to flow down their faces in streams. Still neither could throw the other, never had there been such a wrestling match ! The shouts of encouragement, the cries of the knights, the applause, the excited screams of the women, were deafening. Instead of being a scene at the Court of Kings, it might well have been one in Bedlam. At length the extra weight of King Henry began to tell. He had it in mind to make good his threat of throwing King François, if not across, at all events upon the dining-table. Now backwards he forced his adversary, ever backwards. At last Henry had his foe touching the table, and by sheer strength he forced him down upon it, while golden goblets, wine bottles and fruit stands were sent flying in all directions. It seemed as if the contest were finished, and already the English were shouting with triumph when, just as Henry was making a supreme effort for a final hoist, luck turned. King François felt his heel come in contact with a leg of the table, and, swift as thought, twisted his calf around it, getting a firm grip below the knee. In vain the English onlookers, who could see the trick, yelled that it was not fair ; in vain King Henry, who could not see, now exerted all his strength. The French, who saw and approved of the manœuvre, applauded their King more lustily

than ever, and he, who never was famed for honour, continued to hang on tightly until he realised that his opponent was exhausted with his efforts.

Then suddenly the Frenchman let go his grip from his opponent's body and, placing his sinewy arms on the table behind him, launched himself upwards and forwards. With all his own expiring force, he thrust King Henry back from the table as he regained his own feet. At the same time releasing his hold of the table leg, François twisted his ankle round that of the English King, while throwing one arm around his neck. With his other hand he gave himself a violent push off from the heavy table. King Henry tottered and fell full length, with King François atop of him. Since both were mad with rage and neither would release his grip of the other, the Queens then threw themselves upon their prostrate lords, and, aided by Bourbon and others, tore them apart. They rose to their feet panting laboriously and glaring at one another, when François claimed the victory, which Bourbon, as referee, and all the Frenchmen declared to be his.

Great was the clamour in the large marquee as the English, on their side, declared that it was no victory, that François had triumphed by a foul.

Meanwhile the two late contestants stood, although out of breath, boiling with rage and struggling to get at one another again. In this attempt they were foiled, for a bevy of women headed by Queen Catherine and Queen Claude, pinioned each completely, holding their arms, bodies and even their legs tightly. The headgear and robes of the ladies were disarranged and torn and some were thrown down, but, while uttering shrill cries, they held on as tight as limpets. Never was there such a terrible scene of confusion in a dining saloon, and meanwhile, acting on the sage advice of the Princess Marguerite, all of the ladies in the marquee interposed themselves between the rival Kings, who were dragged

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back exhausted, to opposite sides of the great tent. Then only, when François and Henry were utterly unable to get near each other, did those ladies who held the Kings captive let them go. There were some of them crying hysterically and most of them more or less bruised. Queen Catherine's nose was bleeding, while Queen Claude had sprained her wrist.

Such was the hubbub that for a time it was in vain for King Henry to shout that even if he had not been thrown by a base trick there were two more bouts to be tried, or for King François to yell that he was ready and anxious to continue the match at once. When at last they could be heard, the women and all the great dignitaries of the Church declared so emphatically that the match was at an end that the Kings and the seigneurs on both sides who wished it to continue, were compelled to give way.

Reluctantly at length, the King of England had to accept the services of the sprightly young Anne Boleyn to help him to reassume his discarded garments, while Bonnivet, the French King's favourite, assisted his master at the same time to repair the disorder of his clothing. Then, seated once more at the festive board but now at opposite sides of the table, each of the wrestlers was supplied with wine. The other convives resumed their seats also, and passed the goblets of the champagne wine, which was just then coming into general favour as the rival of the old-time vintage of Burgundy.

By this means the angry Kings were kept apart, but all dreaded what might happen when the time should come to leave the feasting tent. The more far-seeing of the French seigneurs present especially dreaded what form the revenge of the English King might take, since he had not been allowed to finish the three wrestling bouts, but left with the stigma of being vanquished after one only.

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Fortunately, a short time after the disturbed and dishevelled company had been re-seated, a diversion came, the clarions of two heralds being heard loudly ringing without in musical fanfare.

"What trumpet is that?" exclaimed excitedly Madame Louise. "Enquire hastily, I recognise the air as that used at our Court of Savoy." A messenger was sent out and word immediately brought that two heralds of Savoy desired admittance.

"Admit them at once," ordered Madame without further reference to her son, who was seated next to her. Instantly two pursuivants, decked with tabards bearing the arms of Savoy, entered. Sounding their trumpets, they marched around the table, and then, halting opposite Madame and King François, bowed low and craved leave to announce their mission.

CHAPTER III

BAYARD

"SPEAK, gentlemen," exclaimed Louise de Savoie. "What tidings bring you of our puissant brother the Duke of Savoy? Is all well at his Court—what brings you hither?"

"Most exalted Highness," replied the senior of the heralds, "all is well in Savoy and in Piedmont, where His Grace the Duke Charles III. at present is residing in his palace at Turin; and with all due reverence to you, our master's most exalted sister, and to his Royal nephew, His Grace of France, we would announce a noble messenger without, who bears personal tidings and craves an early audience—yet would he not presume untimely."

"A messenger! what messenger?" enquired King François, who, becoming interested, forgot his recent wrestling match.

"Most mighty Monarch, we announce as bearer of despatches from the Duke, the puissant Chevalier, Pierre de Terrail, Seigneur of Bayard in Dauphiné, our mighty master's long-trying counsellor and right hand in the field.—'Tis he well known to all the world of arms as the Chevalier *sans peur et sans reproche*."

"Bayard! Bayard! he of whom we have been speaking!" A buzz of excitement ran round the table and throughout the large marquee. The Princess Marguerite and all the ladies present seemed particularly interested, and the former, speaking across the table to her brother, remarked:

"Bayard—to think of it—what a lucky chance, my brother! we women all die of curiosity to see him. You will surely have the Chevalier admitted without delay?"

"He is no ladies' man, the wearers of the petticoat need not expect to see much if you do admit him, Sire," drawled Bonnivet. "I should think we have heard enough of him for the present anyway; Your Grace might well let him wait until a more seasonable moment."

"Ay, Brother France," interrupted King Henry, "until we have resumed and finished that match for instance, that, it seems to us, is the most important business for the moment."

"Your Grace of England," quoth Marguerite with a pleasant smile, "prithee finish the match another day; we all could see that you and my brother are about equal, therefore the result will be something for us to look forward to. But now, we crave of Your Grace, have pity upon us women, who fain would see with our own eyes a knight who, according to your own relation, cares naught for womankind. He must be *rara avis in terris nigroque similimo cygno*, and we have none such in France, nor I believe have you in England."

"Gadzooks! no, Madame," replied Henry, "we of England ever loved a pretty lass, we confess." And turning to the juvenile Anne, who was politely hovering behind his seat, bearing the velvet mantle which he had not resumed, the English King asked her with a burning glance, intended for a smile, to bring him another cup of wine.

Madame, who was looking angrily at the Admiral, now observed:

"Listen not to Bonnivet, your evil counsellor, my son, who would ever spoil the pleasure of all save himself, but pray admit the Chevalier without demur. We long for news of our country and our brother."

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"Ay, Bonnivet, my dear friend," observed François indulgently, "you would not have us show lack of courtesy to our mother? Heralds, we beg you tell the Chevalier de Bayard he is right welcome to our Court of France, and say that we would see him now."

A moment later, a tall and singularly powerfully formed knight was admitted. He was still young, apparently in the thirties, and his face, while benignant, yet shone with intelligence. His eyes, which were almost black, flashed fire from otherwise placid and somewhat pallid features. They gave the impression of extraordinary alertness as, in entering, the knight glanced swiftly round the marquee, apparently taking in all that it contained. His helmet was carried behind him by a very handsome squire, of noble but jovial appearance. As, having in a second recognised Louise de Savoie, whom he had seen in his youth, Bayard bowed towards her, and then to her son the King of France, the gorgeously attired seigneurs present marvelled at the simplicity of the weather-beaten armour in which he was clad. Unlike themselves apparelled in highly polished harness, inlaid with gold, and wearing golden chains, Bayard wore steel of serviceable black, which was dented in various places. The sole ornaments he bore were the golden knightly spurs. His lance and shield he had left without, but the sword at his side was a tremendous weapon of great weight, the hilt of which, shaped as a cross, was unrelieved by a single gem. There was a momentary silence in the marquee, only relieved by a rude titter from Bonnivet, as all gazed upon the renowned Chevalier, and then the King of France rose from his seat and, advancing towards the remarkable visitor, halted and observed him curiously. Bayard sank respectfully to one knee, as the young King stood before him and addressed him.

"What good wind blows you to the Court of France, Sir Pierre de Terrail? It is a country that owes you many a debt of gratitude. But rise, Bayard! It is not fitting that he who rescued Charles VIII. at Fornovo, who shared with our late cousin Louis XII. the honours over the Venetians at Agnadello, and who charged by our side at Marignano, should kneel to the King of France whom he himself dubbed knight among the dead and dying upon that glorious field."

"A glorious field from which, luckily for France, the English longbow chanced to be absent," observed Henry, sotto voce, to Cardinal Wolsey, who smiled disdainfully.

"Rise, Chevalier, we say," repeated François, "we would present you forthwith to the great Queens and Princesses here assembled. His Grace of England you have met before, in days when he was not as now the friend of France, but strove against her sons in hot encounter."

Bayard did not rise, but shot a swift glance at Henry VIII., in which a close observer might have fancied a gleam of satire, and remained on the knee as he replied: "His Majesty of England seems somewhat flustered, Sire. I trust naught may have late transpired to shake this new found friendship?"

"'Twas but a wrestling match betwixt us left us somewhat heated. We had but one bout in which we were the victor. His Grace now pants for revenge, these gentle ladies will not have it so but most impatiently declared they would behold your features, learn your news of Savoy. 'Twas thus we bade the heralds beg you enter, Bayard."

"A gentle contest, Sire, should not be interrupted ere it be ended, lest rancour prove its legacy. 'Twere best to end it now nor let Bayard prove a spoil sport." Glancing boldly at Henry, the Chevalier continued: "I pray His Grace of England seek

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not revenge in other fashion for this unfinished match, of which the rumour reached me and my company on entering the camp but now."

Seeing her son looking dubiously at Henry upon hearing these words, Madame rose from her seat and approached Bayard in turn. Holding out her hand to him to be kissed, she observed: "Why rise you not, Chevalier, when you are bidden by the King my son?"

"Madame, Bayard brings letters and a petition, it is but meet that a petitioner should remain upon the knee until he learn a Monarch's pleasure." So saying, the Chevalier turned and took two letters from his squire, who was kneeling behind him, and who extricated them from a locked leather satchel. One of these he handed to the King and the other to Madame Louise, upon both being set the seal and superscription of the Duke of Savoy.

The compassionate Princess Marguerite was meanwhile closely watching Bayard's noble features, in which she fancied that she detected signs of fatigue. As the King and his mother were opening their letters, the young Duchesse d'Alençon accordingly came up and said smilingly to François: "Raise the Chevalier, gentle brother, and consider his petition later; he is, methinks, somewhat travel-worn and should be bidden to our festive board. Moreover, we ladies of your Court all long to learn if this great soldier's speech be soft as his right hand is ready."

"Ay, Sire," said the Comtesse, who had followed Marguerite, "we women of France dearly love a lion, and since this lion seems a gentle one, from all reports, that never useth his claws on women, we fain would lead him with a silken chain to yonder board, and seek with gentle speech to win from him the story of his great adventures. You, Sire, meanwhile, can read your deep despatches, as Madame doth already."

François laughed. "Come, Bayard, you hear these ladies! Now must you rise and pay your courtesies, and see you do so with all gentle grace, for we have never yet heard you have speech of woman, and would see how you bear yourself. Lead him away, Marguerite; if your bright eyes cannot soften this fire-eater, the days of France are numbered."

"And mine, Sire—do they then count for nothing?" enquired Françoise, pouting with her rosy lips; "may they not take their part in the lion taming?"

"Yours are too dangerous, Comtesse, they would kill," replied the King. Then, turning to the Chevalier, who had not moved, he added, "why do you not go with them?"

In a confused manner the knight replied:

"Sire, I pray you read the despatch, then will I retire. These puissant ladies will, I pray, excuse me, they are too great and beauteous for one so humble as Bayard to offer them humble service; he knows not the courtier's arts, but vainly would he seek to please them."

Hearing these words, Marguerite retired, a little disappointed and piqued; the Comtesse, however, lingered familiarly by the King's side as he commenced to read. Bayard, who was observing Françoise carefully, for all his humility, with his shrewd wits penetrated the thought in her brain. He knew that this unknown lady desired ardently to learn something from him, and, anxious to oblige her, as the King moved a short distance away for a moment to confer with Madame concerning their despatches, he asked bluntly:

"What is it that you would know of me, yet would not ask aloud?"

Françoise started. Was the man a diviner? Well, no matter, she would seize the opportunity. Speaking low and rapidly, and scarcely moving her

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lips, so that she might not be observed, the Comtesse asked, "Hath the Seigneur de Fleurange come with thee?"

"Ay, he came," replied Bayard simply, "and is without."

"I thank thee, Seigneur," replied Françoise almost inaudibly, and she went back to the dining table, while the King, whose face was perturbed, returned to Bayard's side. His mother was with him. She stretched out her hand to the Chevalier for the second time, and grasped him by the wrist, exclaiming: "To thy feet, thou most excellent servitor of our House of Savoy!" and forced him to rise. "We have read our own despatches, wherein our noble brother speaketh of thee with love and affection, much regretting thy departure. The King our son hath not, however, read all of the letter thou hast brought to him, merely glanced at it, and is disturbed, and we would know the reason," and Louise turned enquiringly to her son.

"The point, honoured mother, is this," he remarked, as he looked at the sheet in his hand, "the Chevalier Pierre de Terrail, Seigneur de Bayard in Dauphiné, hath, with our uncle of Savoy's permission, come hither with a force of men-at-arms, all gentlemen of known lineage, raised at his own expenses, and seeks permission to enter our service and swear fealty to us."

"Then why not grant it without demur, my son?"

"Our uncle of Savoy apparently gives us a grave reason for caution, one that we scarce know if the said Chevalier would have us read aloud, as it toucheth closely the honour of our guest of England. If he fear not to have it so read, we may take it that he is a true man—should it be otherwise, we will not have him in our service."

These words were spoken by François so that all men, including King Henry and Cardinal Wolsey, might hear. They caused various startled ex-

pressions to arise from those present, but while Wolsey maintained an inscrutable countenance, Henry merely ejaculated "Humph!" and shrugged his shoulders.

"I beg Your Grace to read aloud," exclaimed Bayard boldly, and as he spoke he allowed his piercing eyes to fall upon the Cardinal of York with such an expression of disdain as caused him to shift uneasily in his seat.

"We can omit the preambles," said François, "but will read that to which we have referred," and he commenced: "The said Captain Bayard hath imparted to us that he hath certain information that in this supposedly friendly visit of His Grace of England to Guines, to meet you, our Royal nephew, at Ardres, there is concealed a danger——"

"What danger?" enquired Henry in a loud and truculent tone, but François, not heeding the interruption, continued:

"A grave danger to the realm of France in the assemblage of a large body of troops by His said Grace of England at Calais, hard by Guines, while the meeting is taking place."

The Cardinal of York turned pale at the lips as he listened. "What can this rascal have learned?" he remarked to his master in English. "Control yourself, Sire," he added, "let us maintain a bland expression of diplomatic innocence, whatever we may hear next."

"My expression shall be as stolid as that of an ox," replied Henry, as François went on: "For, from sure tidings which hath been brought to our loyal servant and friend, the Captain Bayard, various undertakings and treaties have recently been entered into by His Eminence, the Cardinal of York, with the consent of His Grace of England, with our Imperial cousin, Charles V., the Emperor being, as all men know, no friend to France, or to you, our Royal nephew."

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François, who looked white with indignation, strode across to Henry, where he sat at the table. Laying the sheet before him, he pointed to the paragraph he had been reading, and enquired, "Brother England! Is this true or lies? Have there been treaties with the Emperor? Are not you, then, as we thought, our firm ally?"

The King of England, acting upon his promise to Wolsey, was diplomatically bland. With the most amiable of smiles on his broad countenance, he replied good-naturedly: "This busybody hath been making a fool of your uncle of Savoy, Brother France. Of course, there have been treaties with our young nephew, the Emperor Charles, as his aunt, our Queen, would have us affiance our daughter Mary to her cousin. The treaties merely refer to the distant future. A mere family arrangement, by Saint George! Perfectly harmless."

"Family arrangements between great Monarchs are always perfectly harmless, as we all know," replied François with a sneer, and, striding back to the place where he had previously been standing near Bayard, he continued his reading:

"The said Captain hath accordingly represented to us, as your allies, our good nephew, that Calais lying near the confines of the Low Countries, over which, in addition to Germany, Austria and Spain, the said Emperor Charles hath sway, and where he is at present raising an army for unknown purposes, the English troops might, with ease, pass over into Flanders. Further, that it would therefore be of considerable advantage for the arms of France to be reinforced at what might prove to be a critical moment."

Wolsey, seeing his hand thus exposed and his coming treachery to François thus laid bare, could not keep silence.

"How truly disinterested is this Captain Bayard! And so that is the reason that we now see him

gracing this assembly—not merely that he might break a lance or two with these knights of two nations here assembled. And what may be the reward he asks for this his most exquisite discernment?”

Wolsey paused, and all present looked at the Chevalier inquisitively—King François as sharply as any. Bayard, save that his wonderful eyes flamed as he met the Cardinal’s gaze, gave no sign. As he stood there with his left hand resting upon the hilt of his sword, he might have been a pillar of stone. His nobility was so apparent that a low murmur ran over the lips of the French seigneurs and ladies. From one of admiration of the Chevalier, it turned to a mutter of disapprobation as all turned to look at the Cardinal, who was evidently disconcerted. The English lords remained silent, but their glances were threatening as their hands silently fell upon their sword hilts. There was a moment of dreadful tension, while François, with a sarcastic smile upon his lips, looked around and observed the attitude of all. Then he answered the Cardinal:

“What it is that the Chevalier de Bayard asks for, we need no longer read our good uncle’s letter to explain. His demand is shortly this, that he may be allowed to swear fealty to us and to place the troops that he hath raised at his own cost at our disposal, to fight under the French banner in case of emergency of any description. His feats of arms are known, so saith our good uncle, and therefore he adds no recommendation, but we would ask you my lord Cardinal, as a man of known discernment, your advice in the matter, in case we might not be able ourselves alone to determine rightly?”

With a grim smile, François paused as though for an answer, but the Cardinal of York, instead of replying to the French King, leaned across the table and spoke emphatically to his master in his own tongue.

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“Sire, this man is invaluable—he hath not only courage but brains, and secret sources of information in high quarters into the bargain. Ask France for him, Sire, for to England he well may prove a dangerous foe.”

Henry rose from his seat and walked to the side of François, where he stood near Bayard. Placing his hand familiarly on the French King's shoulder, he said: “Brother France, to show that we are forgetful of our recent discomfiture at the wrestling, and are your true allies, let us relieve you of the charges of this worthy knight and his followers. We will take him into our own service and employ his valour for the common weal. How say you? Shall it be so?”

Upon hearing this calm request, King François simply stared in astonishment.

CHAPTER IV

MARGUERITE

WHEN he observed that King François made no reply, Henry remarked : " You agree then, Brother France, and doubtless the arrangement is one whereby we both may profit. The French exchequer, after all this great display " — Henry waved his hand to embrace the sumptuous surroundings—" will scarce, we fear, stand further outlay at the moment, and men-at-arms, even when self-equipped they come, are costly to maintain. Our own exchequer, on the other hand, thank God ! is ample for these and similar expenses."

Had Henry deliberately sought to insult François, he could have chosen no better means than thus to refer to the poverty of France. The allusion was the more galling as before the meeting of the Cloth of Gold the French King had written to Cardinal Wolsey, suggesting that the King of England should forbid the nobles of his suite to erect tents of great richness, and saying that he would do the same. Instead of consenting to keep the expenses down, Henry had done all in his power to increase them, the result having been that, not to be eclipsed, the French King and nobles had almost ruined themselves in order to be able to appear with unbounded magnificence.

François accordingly snorted at the ill-chosen words, and whereas he had indeed hesitated to accept the offer of the Chevalier—partly from motives of

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economy—for nothing in the world would he now have allowed him to take his men-at-arms elsewhere. He accordingly replied haughtily : “ We thank you, Brother England, for your kind consideration of our pocket, but would have you observe that the services of the Seigneur de Bayard are not as yet ours to dispose of. And yet, if you be in sooth the ally of France, when France and England meet the common foe together he yet may charge beneath the banner of Saint George, for now we will accept his proffered services.”

“ Well, well, French interests are our own, as you say, or why this meeting on this happy field? Engage him if it suit you, Brother France, but glance without! It is a goodly company that you will have at your charges. Behold! a very sea of mounted gens d’armes! Nor are all those waving pennons those of Savoy—whom hath he with him? An we be not mistaken, yonder fluttering banner bears the Boar’s Head, the arms of Bouillon. Gadzooks! a miracle! Sir Bayard, have you brought hither with you La Marck, the Wild Boar of the Ardennes?”

François, looking in turn through the open door of the marquee, was filled with astonishment, and, turning to the Chevalier, enquired suspiciously :

“ What mean these numerous forces, these flags of the Duc de Bouillon? how come they with you here?”

“ My Liege,” replied Bayard, “ had Your Grace perused to the end the despatches which I have delivered to your hand, you would have seen that with the proffer of my services is linked a condition—it is that I might bring with me a friend, one who offers France alliance. ’Tis the Prince Fleurance, son of the Duc de Bouillon, Prince of Sedan—he brings a goodly company.”

“ Fleurance! Fleurance here with you?”

“ Ay, Sire, the same was left for dead with forty wounds at Agnadello. Fleurance, my brother-in-arms. And better friend hath no man!”

"Nor woman either, if all we hear be true," answered François scowling. "Madame la Comtesse de Châteaubriand," the King continued, turning to Françoise, "what know you of the coming of this border princeling? You have had a hand in this?"

Françoise rose, languidly advanced to the doorway, and looked forth ere she replied freezingly: "Nay, Sire, no man's coming or going makes any difference to me. No man, Sire," she repeated, "be he Prince or King!" As the Comtesse looked François haughtily in the eyes, it was easy to see that he was rather afraid of her. He quailed and shifted uneasily.

"Well, well, we mean no offence. We merely imagined, Comtesse, that, seeing he was once somewhat your friend——"

"That I had sent to ask his presence hither. Well, Sire, had I done so indeed, I had, maybe, done well for France this day, yet had I nought to say to his coming. Enquire of this knight who comes from Savoy—he will speak truth, they say he is the soul of honour."

Acting on the suggestion of Françoise, the young King enquired of the Chevalier, "How comes this Fleurange with thee, Bayard, to our Court of France? We fain would know the facts."

"'Twas I, Sire, who asked Fleurange to join me," he replied, "knowing that his father and he have ever been the friends of France."

"Have been, perhaps, but are they not now our secret enemies? Are they not now the friends of this young upstart Charles? Ay, this spawn of Austria, Burgundy, and Spain, who, not content with all he hath already, must needs by basest, foulest bribery wrest from us the election to the Empire of the vast German States—claim Milan likewise, that is ours by rightful descent; Naples, too, and all of Italy. How can we trust these Princes of Sedan, friends to a Charles V., a Flemish

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mongrel in whose veins seethes all the treacherous trickiest blood in Europe?"

"Hold, Brother France!" interposed hotly Henry, "we will not stand by and thus hear our nephew, the Emperor, maligned."

"And wherefore not? Have you forgotten that you have declared yourselves our friend? If you be not what you say, then declare this friendly meeting ended, and join your precious Emperor forthwith; continue to discuss with him those family matters that you and His Eminence of York have hitherto concealed from our ears, left it to chance for us to ascertain. One of the happy family of this Imperial circle, we greatly doubt us, is this said Wild Boar of the Ardennes, whose son now stands without. Is it to England he hath come, or France? What say you, Brother England?"

Henry was about to reply hotly, but he happened to catch a meaning glance from the eye of Cardinal Wolsey which checked him, and caused him to answer soothingly:

"Good Brother France, be not so disturbed, we pray, for nought. By our halidame! we of England know nothing of these turbulent Bouillon Princes, either father or son. They are not our friends, nor is the Emperor our ally. He is the nephew of our Queen, nothing more. Concerning Bouillon, therefore, you must enquire of this Chevalier, not of us. 'Tis he hath brought Fleurange, the son of Bouillon, hither."

"Ay, that is so. Well, tell us Seigneur de Bayard! What know you of this fire-eating spark? Is he not hand in glove with Austria? His father late hath treated France unfriendly."

"Sire, of the father's doings I know nought, nor of his secret leanings, but Fleurange, as Your Grace knows well, hath bled for France; he is no friend to the young Emperor, nor was he to his grandsire, Maximilian. I'll answer for him as for myself."

"Which means that Bayard can answer for Fleurange, as Bayard knows him, but can he answer for him as others, his friend the Comtesse de Châteaubriand, for instance, know him?"

This little outbreak of jealousy on the part of the King of France caused covert smiles and little titterings among those present, Françoise herself laughing scornfully outright. Only Bayard preserved a becoming dignity of demeanour, as he answered courteously but firmly :

"Sire, the lady you mention I know not, then what can I know of her thoughts or friendships? If Your Grace like not my offer, no fealty is sworn by me, no alliance made by my brother-in-arms! By Your Grace's good leave, we can return whence we came—to Savoy." He bowed low, and turning to his squire remarked, "Come, L'Allègre! The horses are not yet unsaddled, it seems we are not wanted in France."

François stood irresolute, but a sardonic smile of satisfaction overspread Wolsey's features as the Chevalier de Bayard, halting at the door, bowed again, and then took his helmet from the hands of L'Allègre, his squire.

Fixing his penetrating gaze upon the King's mother, the Chevalier observed: "Should Madame have despatches for her noble brother, Duke Charles, our companies will camp ten miles to the southward to-night, where we will await them."

As his squire was assisting Bayard to don his helmet, the Comtesse stepped rapidly forward, moving with sinewy grace. She was a small woman, with exquisitely rounded form, and her youthful beauty of the voluptuous order. Her features, dark and warm, yet had something tragic in them. A flame of passion, the incarnation of nervous determination, seemed Françoise as she seized King François by the arm, gripping it tightly.

"Sire," she exclaimed, whilst dominating him

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with her glance, "what would you do? Would you let him go at this moment when of all others France may have need of men? If you know not your mind, leave matters to me, I will decide. Will you have it so. It must be, I say!"

The King endeavoured to laugh lightly. "Of course; the wishes of Madame de Châteaubriand are our law."

"'Tis well!" Leaving the King, Françoise confronted the departing knight in the doorway. "Stay, Seigneur!" she cried imperatively, "and listen! You said but now that you knew not the Comtesse de Châteaubriand nor her thoughts. She stands before you; her thoughts are those of His Grace the King of France, and they are these: that you, Sir Pierre de Terrail, have done well to come to France, done well likewise to bring the Sieur de Fleurange with you. Gladly will the King accept your fealty, gladly welcome your friend, the Prince of Bouillon as his ally."

Pausing, Françoise turned impatiently to the French King.

"Come, Sire! Will you not make an end of this?" and she tapped her little foot impatiently.

"Ay, Françoise," answered the King tamely, "you are ever in the right. Stay, Bayard! we beg. Would you still swear fealty to us? Then is your petition granted; and Fleurange likewise we accept."

Bayard paused without making a reply. He seemed to be making up his mind, and determined not to do so lightly. There was silence in the marquee as the great hero of so many conflicts looked around. After allowing his glance to alight for a moment upon Cardinal Wolsey, and then to wander to Henry VIII., a look of decision spread over his features. He handed back his helmet to his squire, advanced to the stalwart young King of France, and sank upon one knee before him.

François held out his hand, and the Chevalier took it in his. As he stooped over and touched it with his lips, Bayard exclaimed in ringing tones, "By God and my good sword, Sire, I am your man."

The King courteously raised Bayard, and then, saying that he would see Fleurange on the morrow, led him to the table, where he presented his new adherent to Queen Claude and the Princess Marguerite.

Although the Chevalier would accept no refreshment save a cup of wine, these noble dames, with the King's mother, engaged him to remain with them awhile, when the Kings, with Catherine of Aragon and all of the French and English knights, left to ride over to Guines to watch some sports in which the English soldiers were to engage that afternoon. With Marguerite remained her sprightly maid-of-honour, the sixteen-year-old Anne Boleyn, but all of the other ladies, including the Comtesse, disappeared from the scene.

While answering the numerous questions concerning her native land put to him by Madame Louise, Bayard could but observe the pensive grace of the neglected Queen Claude, whom he pitied in his heart, and the distinguished bearing of the Princess.

This latter, tall in stature, well formed, and with a lily-like face but faintly relieved by the carmine of the cheek, was of singularly intellectual appearance. Her brilliant eyes were kind, and violet in hue, but her calm features gave the impression of one who had never experienced the ordinary passions of womankind. Bayard knew her story; he had heard of her love of learning, her classical accomplishments, and her love of writing and music, all of which in no way appealed to her graceless husband, the Duc d'Alençon, whose only love was for other women. Although of princely blood, nearly allied to her own, the Duc d'Alençon was utterly unworthy of his wife. A known poltroon,

King François had, upon the pretext of a distant governorship, banished his brother-in-law from the Court, where, had he been present, he would, for that matter, never have been seen in the company of his charming and intellectual wife. For her the knight of Savoy could but feel the deepest sympathy, above all that, in an age of chivalry, she was mated to one openly spoken of by all as coward, one who openly bragged that they were fools who needlessly exposed themselves in warfare or by riding in the lists, when, without so doing, they could enjoy life and keep a whole skin.

Such a man was to one like the Chevalier, brought up from childhood to glory in feats of arms, a being incomprehensible, far worse than a felon who might commit a crime from want or in momentary temptation. Thus, while listening to the animated conversation of Madame, or the occasional remarks of Queen Claude, Bayard with difficulty could keep his thoughts from the King's sister, whose lot was such a sad one.

Marguerite, for her part, sat chiefly silent. She watched the high-born features of Bayard as her voluble mother extracted from him the relation of some daring adventure in which he always contrived to make it appear as if, while others had greatly distinguished themselves, he had borne a part that was unworthy of mention.

Despite the excessive modesty of Pierre de Terrail, it was easy for the three listening Princesses to fathom the real facts of the case, and judge to whom honour was really due.

The King's sister, listening with rapt attention, could not help it if in her mind she sadly made comparison with someone more closely connected with herself, at the mention of whose deeds no woman's eye would sparkle, no noble seigneur speak with aught but contempt. Particularly was she impressed with the cunning skill displayed by

Bayard in, without seeming to do so, evading all vexed questions, ever insensibly gliding over them when touched upon by the chatterbox Madame. Such questions as the probable policy of the English King, the nature of his treaties with the Emperor, were delicately brushed to one side without any definite reply, and yet Louise de Savoie was quite unaware that she was being purposely kept in the dark.

Suddenly the Chevalier met the eye of the Princess, as she smiled approvingly at him. He flushed slightly beneath his tanned skin, for with his quick powers of divination, Bayard recognised that he was in the presence of one as sharp-witted as himself.

He felt slightly disconcerted, moreover, at the smile, which was all womanly and savoured in nothing of the patronage of a great Princess, for Bayard was wholly inexperienced where women were concerned.

What Marguerite was really thinking was: "The Chevalier is no fool, he has gauged the shallowness of my mother and is afraid to trust her—and he is right to be thus cautious." What she did not, however, fathom was an additional cause for Bayard's caution, namely that the juvenile Anne Boleyn was hovering about behind the chair of the Princess, that in the foregoing scene he had noted that King Henry had lost no opportunity of smiling upon her. His lessons in warfare had taught him ever to be on his guard against all who might prove to be possible spies, whether involuntary or no. He had said openly by means of the letter from Duke Charles, all that he had considered right and befitting, he would now add nothing that by being repeated might perhaps work mischief.

He was beginning at length to feel anxiously that his audience had lasted long enough, as his men and the troops of the Seigneur de Fleurance were,

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he knew, all waiting for orders, but he did not know how to obtain his dismissal.

The Princess Marguerite came to his rescue, for she had intuitively divined his uneasiness.

"Chevalier de Bayard," she remarked, "you would no doubt now desire to see to the welfare of your gallant men-at-arms? Did our cousin the Constable de Bourbon perchance point out to you a camping ground?"

"Nay, madame, the Duc forgot to do so, doubtless, in the hurry of the departure with Their Graces of France and England, he overlooked so trifling a matter."

Marguerite rose with a slight flush of vexation on her cheek. The young Princess did not like her mother's favourite the Constable, who, like his rival, the Admiral de Bonnivet, was in the habit of losing no opportunity of making love to herself.

"I call it no trifling matter to be forgotten," she remarked with an authoritative air. "You, Sieur de Terrail, have three hundred men-at-arms, making at four men to a lance twelve hundred men—while your friend of Bouillon has brought a thousand Swiss lances with him—making four thousand more. It is quite an army you have brought between you, to fight if need be for France. Well, Seigneur," Marguerite continued pleasantly, "you will find, if you remain here with us long as we would keep you, that if the King's Constable can forget to shew befitting courtesy to our country's friends, the King's sister hath a better memory. Your camps have been already pitched for you on the western side of the lists, and the butchers and camp-sutlers are now bearing rations to your weary troops, and forage to the horses. By my desire the Sieur Desmoulins, the camp-marshal, has repaired thither in person, to await your further orders for the morrow. I pray you ask for all you need, or rather, I would say, command his services in my name. Nay, thank me

not, noble Bayard, nor marvel at my action. The heads of all, save of the Princess Marguerite, are in these merry-making days full of nought else than joustings and carousals, thus must I oft-times be my Royal brother's mouthpiece."

"Ay, ay, Marguerite," interrupted her mother, pettishly, "in sooth your head is full of everything—but wherefore would you send the Chevalier from us so soon? We have not yet half learned his tidings."

"Then will there be the more to look forward to on the morrow, my mother, and now the Chevalier must need repose," replied the Princess, in a tone which clearly showed that her authority was not to be gainsaid. "Anne," she continued, turning to her maid-of-honour, "I beg you bid the Squire Dalbiac wait without to conduct this noble seigneur to his camping ground."

Checking with a gesture the words of gratitude which sprung to Bayard's lips, the beautiful young Princess made him an amiable sign of farewell and turned to leave the marquee.

Bowing low over the hands which Queen Claude and Madame held out to him a moment or two later, Bayard retired to join his squire, whom he found outside laughing with Anne Boleyn and the Squire Dalbiac.

CHAPTER V

FRANÇOISE

Françoise de Châteaubriand had never been in love with the King of France, whose character she knew *au fond*. She, better than anyone, recognised the dishonourable nature of this handsome Prince, who made so brave a show and was living glorious in the eyes of men, chiefly on account of the bold deeds he had performed in the Italian campaign which he had conducted immediately upon his accession some years previously. For if, as subsequent events but too plainly proved, the word of François was never to be relied upon, that in the field he could conduct himself as bravely as any of his knights he had plainly shewn to the world in the famed battle of Marignano. There he had crushed the Swiss, and seized from Maximilian Sforza the Ducal crown of Milan, which he claimed by descent from the Milanese Princess, Valentina Visconti, Duchesse d'Orléans.

None, however, knew better than Françoise that, had it not been for the foresight of Bayard, who had forestalled Prospero Colonna, the noble Lieutenant-General of Pope Leo X., and driven him from the Piedmontese exits of the Alpine passes, that battle could never have been fought. The wit of Bayard alone, in seizing Colonna after a sudden attack at Villafranca, had made it possible for the French King to pursue his designs and carry them to a successful termination. François, however,

never talked before his fair mistress of the prowess of others at Villafranca, an affair of which in his heart he was jealous, while she had frequently heard him boasting of his own bravery and skill at the subsequent affair at Marignano.

The dishonourable character of the King of France had, however, been made far more patent to the young lady, his kinswoman, by the fraudulent manner in which he had contrived to bend her to his will and to win her favours. Married when but a child, Françoise de Foix had nevertheless esteemed, if not really loved, the jealous husband who kept her shut up in a large castle far from Paris and the Court. She had promised her husband, who was often away himself, that never would she leave her home, where for that matter she was content, and follow him to the Court, unless she received from him, as token that he required her presence, a certain ring.

The King, who had frequently heard of the young girl's beauty, had, however, concocted a plot with Bonnivet, whereby the latter obtained from a dishonest retainer an exact copy of the ring, and then had gone in person and brought the unsuspecting girl to the Court, as by her husband's wishes. Then had it been by the unreasoning jealousy of the Comte de Châteaubriand himself that his inexperienced young wife had fallen before the ardent attacks of François. For, choosing to assume that she had come of her own free will to place herself in the way of her dissolute young monarch, the Comte, after chastising Françoise, to the scandal of the whole Court, had ridden off and left her to her fate. After he had, despite her prayers, deserted her thus, miserable, and with none to counsel her save those who would lead her astray, what wonder if Françoise found irresistible the advances made by the brilliant young King, of whose gallantry and prowess all the world was talking!

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The Comtesse, after her fall, had hated her husband only less than she hated the King and his foppish tool, the Admiral of France, by whom the manner in which he had helped to accomplish her dishonour had been made an open jest. This was greatly relished among the immoral courtiers and dissolute ladies, of whom the King's mother was the foremost, who could not understand that any woman should make an outcry about such a trifle. Louise de Savoie had indeed taken it as a personal insult that, whereas she was quite unconcerned who should learn of her own relations with the Duc de Bourbon, the brilliant Françoise should weep her eyes out merely because her son had honoured her with his affections.

Thus Françoise at first found her lot at the Court indeed a hard one, for among so many hostile faces she found none but who despised her for her want of spirit, while all apparently gloried in her expected downfall. Although her beauty was increasing daily, this downfall had seemed likely to occur at no distant date, when William de la Marck, Seigneur de Fleurange, came to Fontainebleau to take his part in some tilting matches which took place to celebrate the marriage of the Princess Marguerite. In these matches, needless to say, the husband whom the Princess had been forced to take bore no share.

In Fleurange the lovely Françoise found a friend. From the first they were attracted to one another, she indeed at first chiefly so to him, upon seeing him bear all before him in the lists. Soon she gave him unrestrainedly her heart—the heart which had never yet been won by living man.

Fleurange, who had in the beginning experienced only feelings of pity for the King's neglected favourite, first became her friend and then returned her passion. They found frequent opportunities of meeting and he gave her some good advice.

This was no longer to bemoan her lot but to assume an insolent demeanour and browbeat all and, notably, the King. He recommended her to deny herself to him and openly to make him jealous. When Françoise enquired with whom, Fleurange boldly replied with himself!

He was the son of one who had often decided the fate of Europe, an independent Prince, who was claimed as vassal both by the King of France and the Emperor, but who acknowledged neither. Fleurange accordingly pointed out that he would be a more appropriate person for Françoise to distinguish than any French seigneur, as he would be immune from the King's wrath, if aroused.

The advice of the gallant son of the great Robert de la Marck was followed by Françoise with signal success. No longer the King's puppet, she openly affected Fleurange, who followed the Court to Paris, and thus she brought François to her feet, his nature being ever ardently to desire that which he knew to be possessed by others. When at length Fleurange had been compelled to return to his own country, the Comtesse had for long resisted the King's prayers to be to him as before. Although she at length allowed him to have his way, it was upon conditions that left her almost supreme at Court, and with her enemies Madame Louise and Bonnavet reduced to impotence before her.

As for the rest of the courtiers, they, seeing her powerful, cringed before the young beauty, and became her slaves. Real friend, however, she had none, unless it were the newly-wedded Duchesse d'Alençon, herself a disappointed woman from the outset. The friendship of Marguerite was, however, somewhat marred for the Comtesse for two reasons. The first of these was that the tastes of the Princess—Latin, Greek, poetry, the study of modern languages, the investigation and perusal of books dealing with the reform of religion—did

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not appeal to Françoise, who had had scarcely any education before her marriage. The second was one more calculated to keep apart two women who otherwise would have been closely drawn together—it was jealousy. For whereas in her heart the Comtesse despised his despicable nature, Marguerite adored her selfish brother, the King, worshipped him with an almost lover-like devotion, seeing none of his faults but regarding him as something like a god. Fond as she was of Françoise de Châteaubriand, she was accordingly jealous of her power over her brother. She resented the fact that, while she herself had oft-times to beg of him in vain a kindness to one of her priestly protégés, devoted to the new learning of the Renaissance, a word from the Comtesse, spoken with authority to the King, would procure for her at once the attention which she found herself unable to command.

Nevertheless in great matters of State policy, with which Françoise was far too clever to meddle, it was to his sister's educated brain that the feather-headed yet headstrong King was wont to appeal. A good deal of power being thus left in Marguerite's hands in one direction, while a good deal in another, chiefly having to do with the appointments of those about the Court, lay entirely with the Comtesse, the two women did not clash but got on well together on the whole. At heart they were naturally sympathetic, even if they observed one another at times with a certain amount of caution, chiefly due to the perfidy of all surrounding them at the Court.

There, none perhaps suspected the Comtesse more than the King himself. Although he knew that she did not love him, knew that she was perfectly well aware of his infidelities towards her, his pride could not bear that she should care for some one else. Thus he had employed Bonnivet to watch her, until Françoise, who was perfectly

aware of the fact, had made a fool of the Admiral before the whole Court, by arranging an assignation with Bonnivet himself and then sending the King's jester to inform François publicly where she was to be found. When the King had arrived at the psychical moment, to find his favourite at the feet of the Comtesse, his rage and indignation had been changed to mirth at Bonnivet's expense, as peals of laughter from behind a screen gave notice of the fact that half a dozen great ladies had been present as witnesses of the whole affair.

A little circumstance like that was not sufficient to set the King against the Admiral, but as Françoise did not forget to tell him that he had looked as big a fool as his favourite, he had ceased to spy upon the movements of a woman who was far too clever for him.

By the coming of Fleurange he was, however, considerably disturbed, as, in spite of the angry denial of the Comtesse, the King still suspected that she had sent for him. Françoise had not, however, sent for Fleurange, she had merely been previously made vaguely aware of the fact that, under certain undisclosed circumstances, it was possible that he might attend the meeting of the Kings at Ardres. When she had seen the Chevalier de Bayard in the marquee, her heart had given a bound, as she had wondered if he had anything to do with the circumstances in question. And then she had asked him for information, as we know.

When the Kings, with Queen Catherine and their numerous followers, had started to ride to Guines, a great many ladies had accompanied them, and, knowing that François would be certain to be on the watch for her, among these the Comtesse was careful to be seen. All of the time her heart was, however, beating in her bosom, for dearly, dearly, was Françoise longing for a sight of Fleurange. Before starting for the ride she had with dismay,

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however, watched the pennons of Savoy and Bouillon disappearing in the distance. A whole army lay already camped in the near neighbourhood of, but chiefly behind, the Royal marquee. She could not, therefore, tell in which direction the newcomers were likely to take up their temporary abode, and prayed inwardly that it might not be far away.

The anxiety of the Comtesse was relieved when the brilliant cavalcade halted for refreshment at the half-way wooden pavilion, all covered with gold, which was erected upon the borders of the little streamlet which divided French from English territory. There she was joined by one of her pages, whom she had left behind to make enquiries. His information was eminently satisfactory, as she learned that while his Swiss men-at-arms were further away, the camping ground selected for Fleurange himself and his immediate followers had, on account of his rank, been appointed by the camp-marshal on a spot not far removed from her own tent.

After having herself handed a cup of wine apiece to King Henry and King François, the Comtesse seated herself, complaining of the heat which was indeed most excessive. Thus she remained, unnoticed, until the whole of the combined Royal parties had started to continue the ride to Guines, when, accompanied by her two pages, she rode back to the camp at Ardres, which she found almost deserted.

Without the slightest attempt at concealment, which might only serve to attract attention, Françoise rode straight to the gorgeous tent pointed out to her as that of the commander of the newly arrived Swiss troops.

Abruptly telling her pages that she had business there, she sent them off with the horses and then, without hesitation, she passed within. Before her eyes could become accustomed to the gloom, Françoise heard a joyful cry, and found herself in the arms of the Seigneur de Fleurange.

CHAPTER VI

THE TILTING

ON the day following the wrestling of the Kings, a remarkable tournament was held upon the lists of the Field of the Cloth of Gold. It was given by the Chevalier de Bayard to celebrate his arrival at the Court of France, he being the donor of two prizes, both of value. Whereas hitherto, in order to avoid the risk of violent quarrels arising between the French and English knights, all contests since the opening of the lists had been fought with blunted weapons, the tourneys instituted by the knight of Savoy were far more serious. Their conditions were that they were to be fought with sharp weapons and to be of two kinds. For the tilting of knights on horseback, the prize was a ring set with a solitaire diamond of matchless value. Bayard had taken it from the Sultan's brother while fighting with the Hungarians against the Turks in the South of Europe. For the matches with the sword which were to be fought on foot, the Chevalier had provided a beautiful golden bracelet, wrought in Italy by that celebrated craftsman, Benvenuto Cellini. It was engraved with the arms of Pierre de Terrail, and all said that it was the most magnificent specimen of Cellini's art which had as yet been seen at the Court of François I., where later, by the way, Benvenuto in person rendered himself so famous.

This fighting with sharp weapons gave a zest to the jaded appetites of all of the French and English

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Courts, who were tired with the sameness of the every-day routine, consisting of a few shattered spears, a few dents upon the armour, producing merely bruises which could be healed by the application of a little arnica by the Court physicians.

None were more exhilarated than the ladies, who were longing to witness scenes of real bloodshed such as had been frequent in the tournaments of a previous generation. Especially did they hope to see some duels between knights such as Bourbon and Bonnivet, who were known to be each other's rivals, or representative conflicts between chosen champions of the French and English. The good sense of the Princess Marguerite, however, who was selected as the Queen of Beauty who was to give the prizes, prevented any, save accidental, encounters of this dangerous nature. She asked for a Court of Honour to consist of six members. By her request, this Court was to be composed of the two Kings, with the Constables of France and England and one other French and English seigneur. In the presence of this Committee, which assembled at an early hour, all knights drew lots for their opponents, it being arranged that the winners of the first matches were to fight each other later. Knights were allowed, if they so chose, to enter both for the mounted and the dismounted encounters, and a great many did so accordingly; while others only selected the arm, either lance or sword, with which they considered themselves most proficient.

There being a number of entries on account of the great value of the prizes, the sanguinary sport commenced very early in the day, and, in the presence of the assembled crowds, soon the blood began to flow freely. Although it had been ruled that after one or other of the combatants had been badly wounded, the fight was not to be wilfully continued to the death, several knights were before long killed in the tilting, their bodies being carried

off the ground, while the bloody sport continued as though they had never existed.

In these encounters, the Constable de Bourbon was able in a measure to win a triumph over his enemy, Bonnivet. After the earlier engagements had terminated, when the Constable, who had been a victor in his first match, had to tilt again, his opponent was Armand de Bellièvre, a young spark who was the intimate friend of the Admiral, and constantly joined with him in his attempts to upset the Constable's plans. This young De Bellièvre Bourbon ran through the neck with his lance, bore backwards to the ground, and left dead upon the field. The only regret expressed by the victor was that it was not Bonnivet himself whom he had so served.

The Duc de Bourbon was himself subsequently unhorsed, but not injured, by his friend, the Seigneur de Bellabre. As it was in the third of the three courses which were run in each match that, by a blow on the helmet, he was hurled from the saddle, matters between him and Bellabre remained there.

It so chanced that Bayard, who had entered for his own prizes both for lance and sword, had run a number of courses. In all of these the Chevalier had proved the victor, but after vanquishing the gallant Seigneur de Pompéran, who was the Constable's right hand man, and whose life, as all could see, he purposely spared, he found no one left to tilt with but De Bellabre, who had also conquered all his opponents.

These two gallant knights were as regards physique equally matched, but in the previous tilting all of the thousands of onlookers had realised that never had seigneur been seen of such wonderful address with the lance as Pierre de Terrail. This had been proved by the extraordinary circumstance that while he had unhorsed his opponents he had seriously injured none. Wielding his long and

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heavy weapon as though it had been a mere bamboo, he had, in each course, either selected some invulnerable point of his antagonist's armour whereon to strike with the point of his spear, or else had upset him by some trick. Thus several knights had been thrown down by being struck upon the strongly protected knee-cap, one the Chevalier lifted clean out of the saddle by passing the point of his lance between his saddle and the leg, while another had been entirely disconcerted when Bayard had transfixed his stirrup iron, and then, by simultaneously raising his arm, prevented himself from being overthrown by the shock, while unhorsing his adversary. All blows delivered at himself he had in a marvellous manner eluded, by causing his horse to swerve, or by throwing up his shield so that the point of his opponent's lance was caused to glance harmlessly off it and overhead.

Such dexterity had never before been witnessed in the lists, and it was greatly applauded by the onlookers. The defeated knights felt, however, more ashamed of themselves at being thus conquered unhurt than if they had been transfixed from breast-bone to back, especially as the bright-eyed ladies laughed loudly at their discomfiture, as they were helped crestfallen from the ground.

New horses were brought to Bellabre and Bayard, as they stood together in the lists waiting to ride up to salute the Royal personages, where, with the Cardinals and other grandees and ladies of high rank, they sat in a stand which seemed all of gold and silver, covered with blazons of the arms of England and France.

As a sturdy black was being led out for Bellabre, and a beautiful bay for Bayard, the latter approached the former, with vizor raised.

"Fair Knight," he remarked, with a friendly smile, "I would that fortune had been less kind to me, so that I need not run this course with one who by

his brilliant prowess is already assuredly the victor. Yet need it be so? Since mine the honour to present the prize, of your courtesy I beg you now allow me to retire, and thus leave it undisputed to yourself, who surely merit it."

The Seigneur de Bellabre would not, however, have it so. "Nay, nay, fair Seigneur!" he replied, "thus may it not be! Not for the world would I lose the honour which my good luck hath thrown in my way of meeting the noble Captain Bayard! Nor have I vanquished those whom you have overthrown, thus, unless in turn I vanquish you, which is, God knows, unlikely, how can I be called the victor even should you leave the field? There is not one would hail me so!"

"Ay, that is so, Brother," replied Bayard. "I had not thought of that—then must we indeed run our courses. I pray the victory be yours in our gentle contest."

"Victory we one of us must know, and one of us defeat must suffer. Yet, gentle knight, for the honour of the name of Bellabre, a boon I crave, and this it is: That in the three courses we must run together you treat me as one worthy of the steel of Bayard. Master you are, I trow! Of all here present none can wield the lance as you, yet seek not, brother, to unhorse me to my shame by blow on knee-cap or on stirrup iron as you this day have served some others, to make them foolish in the eyes of men, ay, and of women, too. For I would have you know that yonder sits one in whose bright eyes ——"

"Enough! Brother, enough! I understand," laughed the Chevalier. "Say not another word—you shall not be shamed, I vow. If Bayard strike he will strike home, and there's his hand upon it. So look well to your defences, as I will to mine—God speed us both!"

The two knights having grasped one another by

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the hand, drew on their steel protected gauntlets, then, assisted by their squires, mounted and rode together to salute those in the Royal pavilion.

The handsome faces of the two knights were easily discernible, as the vizors of their helmets were still raised, and immense was the excitement among the concourse that lined the lists as they approached. Both stalwart figures, they formed a gallant pair, and public favour was divided between them, wild shouts of "A Bellabre! A Bellabre!" and of "A Bayard! A Bayard!" ringing through the air. While the Chevalier, in his black suit of armour and black plumed helmet, formed but a dingy figure where all else was so bright, the Seigneur de Bellabre, in harness of bright steel inlaid with gold, and wearing a scarlet plume, was quite in keeping with the glorious surroundings of the brilliant field. Owing, perchance, to his brave apparel, this knight seemed to be the chief favourite among the feminine onlookers. As, however, in saluting the Royal personages, by slowly raising and then dipping his spear point, Bayard looked up, he met the eye of the Princess Marguerite. Her face was eager and bright with unwonted excitement, and, as she waved towards him a dainty lace kerchief, Pierre de Terrail could distinctly hear her voice and note that Marguerite was one of those who cried "A Bayard! A Bayard!" Involuntarily a pang shot through his breast. He could not help wishing that he might win with those bright eyes watching him, but sternly he repressed the thought, as he and Bellabre turned and rode off to points in the lists which left them some three hundred yards apart.

The Squire L'Allègre was waiting to have a last look at the girths of the bright bay, which were strengthened with bands of extra strong leather in order to resist the shock of battle. As he raised himself to pull down his master's vizor, the faithful attendant enquired anxiously, "Will you endeavour

to win or to spare the Knight de Bellabre? I heard his words, but the eyes of the whole world are upon us, my Seigneur!"

"If you heard his words, L'Allègre," replied Bayard, "then also heard you mine! If I strike, I shall strike home—see that you have therefore more lances ready."

"Your lordship's pages await with them by the side of the lists," answered L'Allègre, and just then the heralds sounded a warning blast.

Bayard couched his spear in his right hand, and gathered up his reins beneath his shield in his left, and as, a second later, the heralds sounded another note, he lightly touched his fiery bay with the spur and started at a canter, which quickly increased in pace.

De Bellabre gave his splendid black the rein at the same moment, and then bent low in the saddle; the two knights on their armoured chargers went thundering to meet each other.

There was deadly silence in the lists as the champions charged, each manœuvring so as to keep his opponent to his right hand. The suspense was but momentary, and then, with a shock which for a second threw each of the chargers on its haunches, they met. There was a terrific clang of steel on steel, and the splinters of lance staves filled the air in all directions. Then, as the knights slipped by one another and on to the end of the lists, it was perceived that each had covered himself so completely with his polished and emblazoned shield that neither was injured.

A cheer filled the air—the champions were well matched, indeed!

Meanwhile the two warriors were seen walking their horses back to the starting-points, breathing them previous to charging again in the reverse direction.

Attendants ran out and picked up the fragments

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of the shattered spears, others supplied the combatants with fresh lances, and then again they rode furiously on one another. The result was the same as before, save that the shield of De Bellabre was torn from his arm by the blow of Bayard's lance, and that he lost his bridle-rein as he was almost forced from the saddle. He, however, recovered both his grip and his reins before reaching the end of the lists, which were nine hundred yards in length.

The excitement was now intense, and heavy wagers were laid on the result of the third and deciding course.

In these the ladies freely joined, and, among others, Louise de Savoie, anxious to see Bellabre overthrown, since he had defeated her beloved Bourbon, offered to bet Cardinal Wolsey a hundred golden crowns that the knight from Savoy would win. This wager His diplomatic Eminence of York accepted, although he was secretly of the same opinion as herself. Henry VIII. turned at the same time gaily to the Princess Marguerite and made her a similar offer, declaring that he was certain that this time the Chevalier would put in practice one of those cunning tricks with the lance which the on-lookers had previously found so entertaining. The fair Duchesse d'Alençon could not, however, find it in her heart to bet against her own convictions, whereupon His Grace of England, declaring that he must have a wager with someone, turned jovially to her maid-of-honour and offered to bet her a gold brooch that he wore against a kiss from her rosy young lips that Bayard would win.

Thereupon Anne laughed, while the Princess gently reproved His Grace for his impropriety of conduct. Henry was merrily arguing in return that, as Anne was his subject, he had a right without wagering to the toll of a salute, when the heralds sounded the first blast. Then a hush fell on all, and a minute later the trumpets rang out again.

No sooner had the Chevalier de Bayard started on his third course than, although all unperceived, he acted in a manner unusual for a knight in a tilting match. For, instead of ramming his armour-shod feet well home in the stirrups, he carefully withdrew them until merely the tips of his toes rested on the stirrup irons. An instant before reaching his adversary also, to the astonishment of the excited spectators, Pierre de Terrail appeared to have some trouble with his lance. He lost his grip upon the shaft, then recovered it, but awkwardly, so that the point fell and stuck in the ground at the very moment that De Bellabre reached him.

This seigneur, who was desperately in earnest, was riding at the highest speed, with lance couched so as if possible to strike the Chevalier on the helm. Bayard received the blow on the shield instead, which he threw upwards, thus saving his head, which was bowed almost to his horse's mane.

His foothold in the stirrups no longer existing, Pierre de Terrail was borne back over his horse's crupper. As his splendid bay rushed from under him he fell to the ground, but alighted on his feet. He then stumbled to his knees, but in a second was on his feet once more, never having even touched the ground with a hand. He then calmly walked back to, and recovered, his lance, from where he had left it sticking in the greensward a couple of paces behind him.

The witnesses of his fall were astounded. It was evident to all that the Chevalier was unhurt, but it was strongly suspected at the same time by the greater number that he had intentionally brought about his own discomfiture, in order not to win his own prize. Never before had a knight in armour been seen to fall to the ground on his feet when overthrown in deadly combat; such agility in a heavily armed man was unknown!

The Seigneur de Bellabre, who had checked and

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turned his horse almost immediately, in order to see in what condition he had left his adversary, vehemently declared that the victory was not fairly his, vowing that it was evident that the Chevalier could have won the combat had he so chosen. Bayard would not, however, listen to him, but insisted that Bellabre was the winner of all the tilting, and, in consequence, of the diamond ring. Then mounting his horse, which had been brought back to him, the Chevalier rode off to his tent.

CHAPTER VII

THE QUEEN OF BEAUTY

THE afternoon was wearing away when, weary of the glaring heat and continued bloodshed of the combats with the sword, the Princess Marguerite called Anne Boleyn and retired with her from the lists.

She found shelter from the rays of the afternoon sun in a raised pavilion or tribune, standing in the centre of a group of glorious oaks some hundred paces or so back from the field in which the now dismounted knights were still to be seen cutting and thrusting at one another.

In this pavilion, at the head of a flight of broad and carpeted steps, was placed a gilded chair of noble proportions, which was to serve as Marguerite's throne when later, in her office of Queen of Beauty, she would be called upon to give away the prizes.

In this chair the young Princess ensconced herself, while Anne, fanning herself vigorously, threw herself at her feet upon the topmost step.

Marguerite also threw herself back upon the silken cushions in her seat, and for a time remained lost in thought. Presently she asked her maid-of-honour to show her the prizes for the feats of arms, which had been entrusted to her care. These having been handed to her, Marguerite first carefully examined the ring which Bayard had taken from the brother of the Sultan Selim, the almost invincible Turk who even now was again wasting the

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Balkan States and part of Hungary with fire and sword.

"That awful Turk!" the Princess exclaimed, "they say he hath vowed to put twelve million Christians to the sword! Do you know, Anne, my child, that he hath recently carried off heaven only knows how many thousands of maidens, numbers of them ladies of rank, from the south of Europe, and filled his awful seraglios with them? To think of those fair ladies, gently nurtured, despairingly screaming in the arms of some awful Barbarossa, and that with no hope of ever escaping! And unless, instead of quarrelling with him, my brother can find it in his heart to join forces with the Emperor Charles, as His Holiness Pope Leo hath recently suggested, the fate of those ladies ere long may—fearful thought!—be our own. Young Louis of Hungary alone can never stay this mighty invasion of the infidels—they will sweep all Europe before them, as hundreds of years ago their ancestors swept Spain, even the south of France, until checked by Charles Martel, when he smashed them to pieces with his hammer at Tours.

"But what are you thinking of, child, and why are you making such terrible grimaces? yet do you ever think, by the way, Anne?"

"Indeed I do, my Princess—I am a great thinker at times. And just now I was thinking of two things at once. One was that, if he were not a married man of course, I would almost as soon be embraced by His Grace of England as be in the harem of the terrible Turk. Eugh! imagine the bristly red beard of Barbarossa in one's face!—how it would scratch!—now His Grace of England hath none! But this time I am to get his brooch anyway, which is better than his—what shall I call it, Madame, chaste salute?"

"Ay, that will do as well as anything else, and you are accordingly a lucky child," laughed Marguerite. "But what was the other thought?"

"Oh! merely that now we have got Bayard here we need not fear the Turks, he hath conquered them already, they will be afraid to come."

"Bayard! yes, Bayard! Take the ring and give me his bracelet, child. Of what a beautiful design it is! and do you notice these arms upon it? Azure, on a chief indented argent, a demi-lion rampant, sable. The whole surmounted by a bend, or. Think you not, Anne, that she will be a lucky woman who some day will be able to impale her own arms upon this shield? Even the Royal blazon of France would not be there disgraced. Yet, save my young cousin the Princess Renée, there is none to——"

"I doubt me," interrupted Anne, "that neither she nor any other woman need ever dream of impaling her arms on Bayard's shield—for he will never marry, Princess."

"And wherefore not?" responded Marguerite with a pleased expression. "'Tis true he hath greatly impoverished himself, they say, with all his bounties; the endowment of poor but noble ladies, the establishment of convents, the raising of troops from the sons of gentle families. Yet, even if poor, why, with his great name and lineage, should not the Chevalier espouse some fair maiden of high birth?"

Anne laughed merrily. "There is one good reason, my fair Princess, namely that, saintly as he is said to be, none but an angel with wings could be fitted to mate with the Chevalier *sans peur et sans reproche*. Yet is there another, that, with his endless encounters, he must get himself killed in time! Behold him yonder, Madame, thrusting and hewing away in yet another conflict! Methinks, from the purple plume, that 'tis the Scotch knight De Fougas he hath on hand this time. A doughty champion too! How can Bayard always escape? They deal fearful blows, and, see, the knight from Savoy staggers even now!"

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Marguerite sprung excitedly to her feet, gazed intently across at the lists, then sank back upon her seat, smiling.

"Your first reason for his not taking a wife may be a good one, child, but not the second. I tell you he is invulnerable, and, had you but the wit to see it, Anne, is playing a part even now with Fougas, as did he this morn with Bellabre. He may seem to fall, may even allow himself to receive a few scratches, since he would not become the winner of his own bracelet, yet, mark my words, will he not be killed, child, in this or any conflict with sword or lance, here or elsewhere."

Anne dropped her fan, and glanced up smiling saucily into the face of the Princess. There was a distinctly roguish expression upon her countenance as she observed: "How great your interest in the famous Chevalier, my beloved mistress! may your little Anne be permitted to wonder what it meaneth? and likewise may she give a humble warning? 'Tis that, though great his manly beauty, wondrous his skill with other weapons, yet this Bayard, so 'tis said, never yet hath wielded Cupid's bow nor sought to wound the heart of any Psyche. Yet may my Royal Minerva's eyes, which have the hue of fragrant violets, be more powerful than the spells of any Venus to work a charm, ay, one more potent than that of Orpheus. Thus, as all other courtiers of our Olympus here, 'tis Bayard's self shall be subdued."

"Peace to your nonsense, Anne! where learned you your classics, saucy child?"

"Nay, Madame, let me finish! for this is important and part of the warning. Yet may there trouble arise, for Bourbon and the Admiral of France, perceiving what hath chanced, shall hate this noble Paladin ere long as now they hate each other, adoring as they do, Minerva."

"Mention not their odious names to me, Anne!

for scarce I know which I distrust or despise the more. The foppish Admiral is dishonour's self, and, having ever my brother's ear and countenance to back him, comes prating his unlawful love to me with such assurance that I could strike him, tear him with my nails, as once already have I done in self-defence, within my very chamber. Oh! would that my husband were a man, to quell such insolence! As for the Constable, I fear not his burning love shafts, cast sidelong at me, while my fond, flighty mother still marks him for her own. Yet will she soon weary of his long disdain. Already she sees clearly how he pursues me, and hates me for it, though her daughter. Ere long Madame will cease to be his friend, then may we all beware of Charles de Montpensier-Bourbon. 'Twill not be I alone to dread him then, but the King, Madame herself and all of France! First Prince of the Blood of France, he yet hath the half of him Italian—his mother was Gonzaga—his grandsire Duke of Mantua—a tricky, treacherous lot! and with it all too powerful by far, as said King Henry but the other day."

"Ay, my dear mistress, I heard His Grace's words, when he advised your brother the King to take Bourbon's traitorous head from off his shoulders, and that merely because his mien was somewhat haughty. Methinks that in England they take heads somewhat easily, rather would I dwell in France!"

"Where also at present we are safe from the Turk, even if we have our little troubles, my Anne. But list to the shouting yonder! It seems the tournament is done at last, nor can we tell the victor, to whom to give the bracelet, yet must one of them have won while we twain have gossiped here."

"We soon shall know, my Princess, 'tis Bayard or Fougas, for that was the last match. I think the Scotsman won."

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"Or that Bayard said the Scotsman won! Well, soon shall we see, for here they all come—now for our pleasant duties! Give me the prizes and place yourself behind me, child; nay, shake out first the folds of my dress, and straighten the plaits of my hair. Is all in order, Anne?"

"Ay, Madame, the plaits are perfect, and so is my beloved mistress, their Royal wearer." Then, with a sedate expression, the youthful, rosy cheeked Anne Boleyn placed herself behind the throne, upon which Marguerite sat bolt upright with the air of dignity befitting a Queen of Beauty.

Amid tumultuous applause, three weary knights were now urged forward to the pavilion where the Princess awaited. The armour of all three was slightly disfigured by bloodstains, while their faces, which were visible as their helms were being borne behind them, were pallid from fatigue. The centre of the three was Bayard, whose right arm was suspended from his neck by a silken scarf, the others were the Seigneurs de Bellabre and Fougas.

The greater part of the lords who immediately followed the Royal party to the pavilion of the Queen of Beauty were now devoid of armour, being gorgeously arrayed in silken doublets and hose, wearing plumed hats and gaily bedecked with golden chains and other jewels.

The throng was immense and formed a most brilliant scene, while the brightly attired crowd of French and English seemed to be animated with a spirit of jovial hilarity.

None joined in this more heartily than King Henry, who, utterly oblivious of his rank, was as a very boy. He had fallen back from the rest of the Royal party and joined the Duc de Bourbon and an enthusiastic group of courtiers who were to be seen patting the three champions, but especially the Chevalier de Bayard, enthusiastically on the shoulder.

Those in the crowd were meanwhile shouting the words: "Bayard is the real winner!"

In this cry De Bellabre and the Scotch knight were generously heard to join, as the Constable of France at length brought the trio to a halt at the bottom of the steps, which, with exception of a passage-way in the centre, were now crowded with personages of distinction. Taking advantage of the tumult which could not be abated, turning to Anne the Princess whispered, "I admire the good sense of your English King, but note you that my brother, with whom is Bonnivet, appears not to share his enthusiasm?"

"'Tis perchance, my Princess, because they say that Bayard dropped his sword, and was at the Scotsman's mercy, and yet that Fougas did not strike, nor make the Chevalier sue for mercy, though the victor—but himself helped him bind his arm."

Marguerite laughed. "Child, can you not see that Fougas, gallant adversary as he was, knew that the dropping of the sword was a pretence and scorned to take advantage of it? I will see later that he gets advancement. I will further shew you presently that Bayard's arm is uninjured—that therefore he could have won had he so chosen—mark you me, Anne!"

The Constable de Bourbon at this moment contrived to procure silence, when after bowing low to the Princess, he caused the heralds to sound three fanfares. Then, in loud resonant tones, he addressed her.

"May it please your Royal Grace, the Queen of Beauty, to bestow the prizes provided where they are rightfully deserved. Of the three doughty knights here at your feet, the Chevalier de Bayard declareth himself loser and the other twain winners—The matter seems uncertain, may it please Her Grace the Queen of Beauty to decide."

Here all the competing knights cried out once more: "'Tis Bayard is the winner of both matches!"

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whereupon, holding up her hand to obtain silence, Marguerite commanded :

“ Advance, Sir Pierre de Terrail ! and tell us truly upon whom the prizes you have provided should be bestowed.”

Having mounted the steps and placed himself on his knees, Bayard replied : “ An it so please you, most gracious Queen of Beauty, the diamond ring for the tilting falls rightfully to the noble Seigneur de Bellabre, as all could see when, in the third course with him this morn, by sad mischance I lost my lance and fell to the ground.”

Here there was much interruption and laughter, with shouts from the audience—“ Ay, fell on his feet !”

Order being restored, Bayard continued. “ The gallant Sieur de Fogas in like manner wins the bracelet. My wrist but now became most sorely twisted and thus in consequence was I defeated.”

At this there was more merriment. It increased when the Princess replied smilingly : “ Of a truth, most gallant Seigneur de Bayard, do we pity you your sad mishap ! Ay, almost could we weep for sympathy.”

While thus saying the laughing Queen of Beauty made a pretence of raising a kerchief to her eyes. She contrived, however, to cause it to catch upon an ornament of jewels upon her dress. She then allowed it to flutter to the ground by the Chevalier upon the side of his wounded arm, while instantly exclaiming : “ Of your courtesy, fair knight, our kerchief ! we pray of you.”

The Chevalier fell into the trap. Withdrawing his right arm from its sling, he picked up and restored the dainty kerchief to the Princess.

The laughter of all at Bayard now became so loud and long that Marguerite had ample time to turn and remark : “ What did I tell you, Anne ?” ere, turning to the discomfited knight, she observed :

"In sooth, we now perceive, most doughty champion, how severely your arm hath been injured! Our decree is, however, this, that you yourself are the winner of both prizes."

"Nay, nay!" exclaimed Bayard, recovering his wits and in the emergency speaking for once as though he had been a very courtier. "I vow that 'twas but by the saving grace of the Queen of Beauty's bright eyes and condescension that my arm hath sudden recovered the numbness of the shrewd blow stricken upon it by the *Sieur de Fougas*. He alone is the winner of the matches with the sword, while likewise, by all the rules of chivalry as from olden time appointed, since in the final tourney I fell to ground and lost my spear, then was I by *Bellabre* defeated! I appeal to His Highness the Constable of France to be my willing witness in the matter."

"'Twas a deplorable accident, Chevalier—but learn that there is no appeal from our decision. In France the Queen of Beauty's word is absolute and final."

"Then will I appeal from the gracious Queen of Beauty's self to the Queen of Beauty's gracious self that she see justice done, and these two right courteous knights, victors in so many contests, rewarded with the prizes."

"And leave you unrewarded!" replied the Princess with gentle astonishment, "while they themselves maintain you victor! Yet justice you have asked, and justice you shall see to all imparted equal. Nor shall you, Chevalier, the generous giver of this gallant tourney, the generous foe in every conflict waged, be longer gainsaid by the Queen of Beauty. Yet of your courtesy we pray you, one moment stand aside, for to our feet we summon those worthy knights, *De Bellabre* and *De Fougas*."

While these two seigneurs were approaching the Princess, and all eyes upon them in consequence, the

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Chevalier contrived unperceived to back into the crowd and modestly to make his escape.

To each of the gallant seigneurs in turn the Queen of Beauty expressed a few words of courteous commendation, which were happily chosen. Yet, while presenting each of the prizes, she contrived, while interlarding a few of the Latin and Greek phrases which shewed her erudition and made men marvel, to bring in some happy reference to the prowess of the distinguished soldier of fortune by whom they had been offered for competition. The Princess was very popular, and Bayard, by his extraordinary endurance and skill, had made himself so, apart from his previous high reputation. Her words were therefore received with genuine applause and approbation by all save Bonnivet. The Admiral, who evidently was not pleased by the events of the day, in which he had cut no great figure, alone took care from time to time to make some sneering remark sotto voce to King François, by whom only his reflections were heard.

As the Scotch knight De Fougas, upon whose arm Marguerite had clasped the bracelet, kissed her hand and retired, she looked in vain for the Chevalier. Not perceiving him, she turned to Bourbon, remarking, "Most noble Constable, we pray you, of your courtesy, bring back hither the Seigneur de Bayard, for not yet are our pleasant duties accomplished."

While the Constable of France, accompanied by De Bellabre and others, went off to look for the absentee, Bonnivet once again turned to the King of France. He now suggested spitefully that it was possible that Bayard might be nothing better than a spy of the Emperor. He hinted that he had come with forged credentials from Savoy, and marvelled what more the Princess could now have to do with the Chevalier.

François was in the habit of putting up with all his favourite's vagaries, but upon this occasion he

thought that he had gone too far, and accordingly replied reprovingly :

“Peace, Bonnivet! or we shall suspect you of being jealous of Bayard’s renown, which, by Saint Michael, doth eclipse us all, high and low. Such jealousy is vain—’tis patent that his prowess is unequalled. Moreover, Marguerite is Queen of this tourney. Well you know that, by the rules of chivalry, until she end it we cannot interfere—she is sole mistress, be he spy or no.”

Bonnivet moved sulkily to one side as the Duc de Bourbon returned with the missing knight, of whose modest flight he made a jest while leading him back once more to the steps at the Queen of Beauty’s feet.

“What! Sir Pierre,” she exclaimed with mock indignation, “is our presence then so unpleasing that you would leave us without our due dismissal? Have we not granted your requests?—then why this ingratitude? Do you not find us rightly grace our pleasant office?”

“I crave Your Grace forgiveness,” replied Bayard disconcerted. “Knowing not that longer was my presence required hither by the Queen of Beauty and meaning no discourtesy to one so great and fair, but for a minute I passed to the tent of a noble Danish knight upon whose head, alas! I smote over heavily in our late gentle contest. I would see how it fared with him.”

“And who was this knight for whose sake Bayard could forget his devoirs?” inquired Marguerite with a smile which belied her mock severity.

“’Twas he who bore upon his shield, on azure ground, a mullet of six points argent—his name is Gyldenstjerne.”

“It was a gentle action for which we forgive you, Chevalier. We approve that the knight who hath a heavy hand should likewise have a kindly heart. Bear us, we pray you, tidings later of this Danish knight.

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"Now we would speak of another matter. Since all here present have with one voice proclaimed that Bayard, noble giver of this tourney, himself is than all most worthy of a prize—the Queen of Beauty would that prize bestow upon him. Of all the knights here present you, Sir Pierre de Terrail, bear no golden chain ; this we would rectify."

"Nay, gracious Queen of Beauty, Bayard never yet hath worn jewel or ornament ; such gewgaws, when they come his way as lawful spoil of war, he giveth to the poor for love of Mother Church."

"Yet now must he wear one, and that of our Royal command. Of your courtesy, lean somewhat nearer, Sir Pierre de Terrail."

As, obeying her command, Bayard approached until he touched the very knees of the Princess, she, while looking straight into his honest eyes, disengaged from her own neck a heavy chain of gold.

Slowly Marguerite bent over, and exclaiming : "Accept from us this prize of valour," with her own fair hands she placed the golden ornament over Bayard's head.

As her hand somewhat lingeringly arranged the folds of the chain, the Chevalier took it and pressed his lips upon it. As he did so it somehow seemed to him as if the hand of the Princess trembled, as surely did his own at such an unusual honour. So moved was he that for a moment he forgot to release the hand of the Queen of Beauty, and meanwhile all around raised a shout of tumultuous applause.

Then the Princess courteously withdrew her hand and rose to her feet, while observing in clear, silvery tones :

"We declare to all here present these gentle ceremonies at an end."

Bayard sprang to his feet, and, with all present, bowed low as the Queen of Beauty withdrew to the back of the pavilion.

CHAPTER VIII

FLEURANGE

WHEN the King of France, his Queen and his courtiers had all attended ceremoniously at the mounting of Henry and his Queen for their return to Guines, the former took the arm of his intimate Bonnivet and led him off for a stroll round the lists.

François was in an excellent humour at having seen the last of his English guests for the day, and accordingly indulged his caustic wit for a time at the expense of his Royal brother of England, Queen Catherine, and especially the Cardinal of York, whom he detested and whose treachery he feared, and that not without reason.

“Look at the arrogant old bag of crimson potatoes, who wants to make himself our next Pope, where he rides surrounded by his bodyguard of giants! Would you not say, Bonnivet, that he imagined himself the supreme Pontiff already? At all events we can see through him, can we not, my boy? We know the egg the old red hen is so busy hatching underneath that Cardinal’s hat—may it produce but a viper to bite him!”

“Ay, Sire, and we know too how he is working the Emperor all this time in order to secure his support at the next papal election. And that will not be far distant, since His Holiness Leo X. is killing himself with his eating and his drinking, his suppers with pretty farmers’ daughters, his perpetual

hunting parties and other extravagances. But, Sire, we must checkmate the old red bag between us."

François laughed and pinched his friend's arm. "It will take more wits than yours to do it, my boy. Unfortunately this bloated red herring of a Cardinal is not a woman to be got over, or you would be his match, sure enough. We often laugh to ourselves yet to think how you managed that little affair of Françoise de Châteaubriand for us. By Saint Michael! what a fool that husband of hers looked when she came to Court with his precious ring! This fat English priest, however, is of another kidney, dear Bonnivet. How think you, for instance, that he is now carrying on his intrigues with that accursed whelp Charles—the Emperor forsooth!—as Bayard says he is doing, right under our very nose?"

Bonnivet laughed scornfully. "You will not even listen to me if I tell you," he replied familiarly, "so I shall hold my peace."

"Nay, nay, be not vexed with us, dear friend, we meant nothing when we spoke impatiently yonder. Pray forgive us, for 'twas but the sight of the Englishman was really the cause of our impatience. Tell us, we pray, aught that you may know."

"Well, Sire, cannot you see that which is patent to a babe, that 'tis this Dane with the crackjaw name, concerning whose health the knight from Savoy is so solicitous, who is one of the go-betweens? They are in league together, doubt it not. The Dane came to us from the Emperor's Court, saying he would take service with France. Bayard comes hither with a similar story—and, the better to deceive us, makes pretence of unmasking the Cardinal's plans. But did the Cardinal show his displeasure? or King Henry? Did they not offer to take him into their service? Did not His Grace of England, moreover, so far forget his rank as to applaud this Bayard, ay, even pat him on the

shoulder when Bourbon was leading him to the tribune? Whatever part the Dane may have in it, 'tis evident enough that Bayard is in with England. And yet, Sire, hath he been selected by the Princess Marguerite for the highest honour. He will be winning her over next. She gave him her own chain, forsooth! What may we not expect?"

François swore roundly, then laughed lightly, for he was as frivolous as dissolute. "Tush! Bonnivet, have we not already given our sister to you, if you can but have the wit to snatch her from Bourbon's clutches? Well, 'tis your business to keep her out of mischief. As for the Dane, he matters little," the King continued, "we can send him back to Denmark, on pretence of change of air being good for a cracked skull. So see you to it, beloved friend—Bayard we will treat differently."

"Ay, the matter of the Dane is easy, but what of the other? How will you treat him, Sire?"

"Arrest him, kill him if needs be; for now we believe you speak truly, and, we see it, he is indeed the Emperor's spy. But, Bonnivet, he must give us an opportunity first to convict him openly, for he is strong in public favour."

"He will give us an opportunity, Sire, never fear, but what about this Fleurange? You have not received him yet. He is strong, and will resent the slight, indeed hath done so already, or why entered he not the lists in all this day's tourneys? See him, Sire, and at once; speak friendly to him, ask for his aid to garrison Dieppe, then send some of his numerous following away, and thus the better, when the time comes, shall we be able to deal with Bayard."

"Ay, Bonnivet, we have been wrong to show our temper with this spawn of Bouillon. We must not antagonise him as, it seems, we have already done his father! 'Tis our hot French blood, however, leads us astray; thus when we hate we show it,

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Had we but the Emperor's phlegmatic Flemish nature, we had perchance done better."

"True, Sire, he is a calculating youth that Charles, and you should learn to practise his dissimulation. He would have invited Fleurange to supper, received him with open arms, made much of him before his Court. Then when next morn he learned the sad news how Fleurange ne'er had reached his home alive, the Emperor would have wept, ay, deeply deplored his loss. Even would he have craved the honour to be a pall-bearer at his funeral. Now you, Sire, on the other hand, must needs openly show your dislike, or shall we say distrust, and thus at least you make two enemies."

"Two enemies! Whom mean you, Bonnivet? Fleurange and Bayard, we suppose?"

"Nay, Fleurange and a lady; one who in the past hath shown an interest in him."

"The Comtesse! Name her not! She cares nought for him now."

"'Tis not I who have named the lady's name, nor will I. Maybe it is another—'tis not well to be so outspoken, Sire."

"Ay," replied François scornfully, "we forget ourselves and your sage advice. We should learn to dissimulate, like our precious cousin, the Emperor."

"Or the Cardinal of York—thus will you the better gain your ends and crush your foes, be they secret or open."

"Well, Bonnivet, let us begin at once, and with Fleurange. But first let us to our tent, there to quaff a cup or two of wine while sending for him. Are you not athirst? We vow our throat's afire."

"Sire, I could swallow the river Seine! Let us go and drink confusion to our foes, and thus the better gain a smiling face to greet them when they come. And meanwhile let us not talk of them but of women, the divine sex—all there is worth living for."

"You are a merry dog, Bonnivet, and we are agreed, so that you prate not all day long of our charming sister Marguerite. We weary of her name on your lips almost as much as of her interference in our State affairs. We have given her to you, so take her when and how you can, but bore us not now further with her name, for we have our own fancy among women, and would talk of her. 'Tis a divine angel just come to our mother's household, as yet a very child, but such eyes! Oh, you would adore her. Yet have we purposely hidden her from you, you dissolute dog, for well we know your treasonable tricks. You would forestall your Sovereign, and that not for the first time either!"

Bonnivet laughed impudently. "Sire, in love it is as in war, every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost. But tell me about this new beauty—what colour *are* her eyes, and what is her name? Now that I have, by your gracious permission, a free hand where my heart is concerned, I will leave her alone, I vow it, upon the faith of——"

"The faith of a Bonnivet, we suppose," laughed François. "Well, you shall see her shortly, for we fear you not, our mother will protect us. She will see to it that none save the King her son hath private access to the newly caught daughter of the Seigneur d'Heilly, the lovely Anne de Pisseleu. She would not have her learn too soon the follies of the Court, which one like you would seek to teach her all too early."

"And which, of course, the Very Christian King would not!" responded the Admiral with an insolent laugh. And then the debauched young Monarch and his bosom crony entered the Royal tent, and commenced to drink together, while waiting for the Seigneur de Fleurange to appear.

The Prince of the House of Bouillon, who had easily understood the slight that had just been put upon him, did not, however, hurry himself to attend

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upon the Very Christian King, and while waiting for him François, who was imbibing freely, became more and more intimate in his manner with the Admiral. All ceremony was at an end between the two young men; as they whispered good stories into one another's ears, or, with ribald jest, took away the characters of the women of the Court, they might have been of equal rank instead of Monarch and subject.

Inflamed with wine, and forgetting longer to use the Royal "we," François at length remarked, "Bonnivet, my boy, I will tell you a secret if you will swear not to divulge it—'tis about my little beauty. If you would like to see her I can show her to you presently, for my saintly mother hath promised me to leave her, as by accident, alone in her tent, where I will surprise her. I would have your advice, my boy, not concerning her person—of that I can judge for myself—but as to her mental capacity—I have a particular reason."

Bonnivet laughed. "Since when have we commenced to trouble ourselves about the brains of a woman? To my mind, the more harebrained they be the better—but what is the reason, my Royal friend—and hath not the charming Françoise too much brains for you already! Is she not ever too ready with her advice—her good advice, forsooth! especially when she would persuade the King of France that he should behave unkindly to his faithful friend, the Admiral of France?"

"Now you have said it, Bonnivét. Even if she hate you, Françoise hath a good understanding, and, for one in her position, placed as a permanency about the King, brains are required. Yet 'tis evident that Françoise cannot last for ever, she rules me overmuch, and therefore, although useful, ay, most useful as a foil to my too interfering mother and too erudite sister, her time will come to go—what say you?"

"I say that to my mind her time hath come to go already, for there is not room for us both about the Court and, verily, if she hate me, I hate her."

"Just because she made a fool of you when you imagined that you had won her over to being unfaithful to me, which although she loves me not, was somewhat premature on your part—come, own it friend."

"Ay, I should have known better, for the time had not come for you to tire of her, and the baggage knew it."

"Nor hath the time come yet, for she hath her uses, she is young and her beauty is great, but it will come, and I am looking forward to the future when she must be replaced—her position given to another. Now see you not that it will not then do for the King of France to have here in her shoes one devoid of sense, one who will not teach him discrimination in the choice of his friends? Tell me that, Bonnivet, my boy?" and François dug his friend in the ribs and chuckled.

"So that the Very Christian one's future favourite teach him not to discriminate against me, I care not who she be," replied the Admiral with candour. "That fact alone will prove that she hath more brains than the saucy Comtesse, to whom I drink confusion. Why do you not get rid of her now, and have done with it?"

"Because the future incumbent of her office is as yet but a fair little dove, a very fledgeling; some years must elapse before I can establish her as a lady of rank at the Court, give her a husband of high enough position. In the meantime, while my mother is carefully training my young dove in all the required accomplishments, I must keep Françoise where she is, later she can go to the devil for all I care, or back to her husband which is the same thing. Till then, hark ye, my very dear

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friend, be guided by me, flout her not overmuch. She fears me not, indeed 'tis rather I who fear her—when I am sober that is—and some day she—the saints forbid it!—might cause me to do my dearest friend some injury. Therefore if you love not Françoise, yet seem somewhat to love her, lest perchance your skin should suffer, or your pocket, she is too strong for us both and will so remain until I send her packing.”

“Ay, love her at a distance!” muttered the Admiral savagely between his teeth, “but let me soon see this new little pigeon you have in the nest. I should do well, methinks, to commence paying my court to her early, if but to teach her discrimination.”

“Nay, nay, my boy, there will be time enough for that teaching later, first let us judge her carefully together, as though she were some young filly. At present I would not have my mother see you near her overmuch or 'twould spoil all. She would, of a surety, set her against you.”

“Yet will you have to provide her with a husband—one whose rank must needs be of the highest—and who will perforce be enriched with castles and lands wherewith to occupy his time while staying away from home. 'Twould be well, perhaps, were the young dove to learn in time to see him in one whom the King loves.”

“In Bonnivet for instance? would you do it for me, my boy? the castles and lands should surely be yours, ay, and a Duchy too—there's my hand on it.”

“Is there anything I would not do for you?” replied the Admiral, and the pair of rascals grasped each other by the hand.

At this moment the sound of martial music and the trampling of horses could be heard approaching.

“This swine of the Ardennes comes at last, and

in pomp too," observed François rising, "he hath taken his time in polishing his tusks! Would that I could break them for him. I loathe the insolence of these La Marcks—these vassals that refuse to pay homage. Now, however, will we play the King and assert ourselves indeed. Bonnivet, friend, call in all the great officers of the household and take your place foremost amongst them, we must receive him in state and teach him his dependence."

The Admiral moved to the rear of the King's huge tent and gave an order, then, swiftly returning, said to François: "Sire, remember my late words, and, moreover, that the young Boar refuses homage to the Emperor also. Then better to have him for an ally than drive him to the Court of Flanders, where Charles now is with his aunt the Archduchess Marguerite, the Regent—who hates France and would be glad to get hold of him—be not over rough with him, Sire, those soldiers of his may well be worth their keep."

"You would have us diplomatic, well, we will try our best, but, Bonnivet, sadly will it go against the grain, above all when we know full well that this sucking pig of Flanders hath but come here grunting after Françoise."

"Would he but bear her off with him to his pigsty in the Ardennes you would be well rid of her! Think not of her then in your coming audience, but rather of the little pigeon who is to replace her when she is gone, and smooth his bristles the right way."

"Have we not said," replied François pettishly, "that we have not yet done with her, she cannot be spared for some time to come. Nevertheless, my boy, we will endeavour to coo like a sucking dove if you would have it so, rather than bark at him like a boarhound." So saying François re-seated himself.

"Neither coo over much nor bark over much,

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be merely diplomatic with Fleurange, Sire, above all, remember to try to get him to send a garrison to Dieppe. Now here are the Grand Master and the Chamberlains, I will take my place with them."

As a flourish of trumpets without announced the arrival of William de la Marck, the Admiral, with a bow which shewed none of his late familiarity, fell back to join the Grand Master and other officials who ranged up behind the King of France.

A moment later, with much ceremony, the heralds ushered into the Royal presence a handsome fair-haired and blue-eyed knight, whose expression was one of careless good-humour. Over a purple velvet pourpoint he wore a light cuirass of most beautiful Flemish workmanship, it being inlaid with scroll-work of gold. Other armour he had none, but he carried his sword at his side, while a squire following bore his helmet, and a shield upon which was painted the device of a boar's head of ferocious aspect.

Notwithstanding the fact that the Seigneur de Fleurange was renowned for having escaped alive after receiving forty wounds at Agnadello, he shewed no sign of a scar on his face, while his health was apparent. Of the middle height, the breadth of his shoulders was remarkable ; it was easy to see that he was possessed of immense strength. He wore a large fair moustache but no beard, and was generally of attractive appearance

King François looked at Fleurange keenly as he advanced then, as if with an effort, half rose from his chair to receive him. He then sank back again but did not extend a hand. This reluctant motion of welcome did not escape the princely visitor, who acted accordingly. Instead of placing himself on one knee before the King, he merely bowed lowly then stood, with careless attitude, waiting to be addressed.

"We welcome you once more to our Court, Seigneur de Fleurange," said François curtly.

"Twas yesterday you came, was it not? We heard some tidings of your arrival and of some troops with you."

"Oh! Your Grace heard then?" replied Fleurange laconically and in a casual manner which irritated the King.

"Ay, the Seigneur de Bayard told us, and somewhat of your seeking an alliance with us likewise. We confess to somewhat of surprise, as we had not imagined that nowadays you bore such goodwill to France, but we would hear from your own lips what it is you offer."

"To please my brother-in-arms, the Chevalier de Bayard," replied Fleurange with hauteur, "I came to offer my alliance and the services of my Swiss men-at-arms to the King of France. Should the Very Christian King not require either, I can take them elsewhere——" He half turned as though to leave the tent, and beckoned to his squire for his helmet.

François would have let him go, but at that moment he heard Bonnivet's voice whispering in his ear: "Coo! Sire, coo! remember that Dieppe is without a garrison."

Warned by this timely interruption, François mastered himself and spoke more diplomatically. He thanked Fleurange for his offers, which he accepted almost gracefully. He could not, however, quite forget to assume a somewhat sarcastic tone when saying that his Chancellor should arrange the amount of subsidy which he supposed, as usual, would be required in payment of any services rendered by Bouillon.

Fleurange, however, would not see the sneer, but merely laughed good-naturedly. The House of La Marck was indeed unaccustomed to give its arms for nothing, and the cause of the quarrel now existing between François and Fleurange's father, the Wild Boar of the Ardennes, was that the

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French subsidies, according to treaties of the time of Louis XII., had remained unpaid.

The good humour of Fleurange disarmed François, who, unbending so far as to offer his guest a cup of wine, at the same time requested him to send a considerable garrison to Dieppe. The Prince of Bouillon declined the wine, but, after having said that he would settle the matter of the garrison of Dieppe with the Chancellor of France, requested permission to retire.

This permission was accorded by François, but, as upon the arrival of Fleurange, the young King again did not extend his hand, but merely bowed stiffly upon bidding his new ally farewell.

The latter, as he stepped out, felt all the better pleased at the omission. Fleurange did not want to touch the hand of the King of France, whom he thoroughly despised. He promised himself, however, to make the French Chancellor pay all the more highly for his master's want of courtesy to one of his rank, one who had, moreover, in days gone by fought nobly for France.

CHAPTER IX

MARGUERITE AND BAYARD

THE evening had come, and Marguerite, with a packet of papers in her hand, was strolling unattended. Loveless as was the existence which she had led ever since her marriage, the Duchesse d'Alençon yet was writing a book which dealt of love. She intended to call it "The Heptameron," and it consisted of a large number of tales, chiefly founded on fact, concerning the amours of people of every rank and of every country. In these she gave free scope to her sarcastic wit and her sentimental fancies alike, but beyond changing the names of the men and women whom she introduced into her stories of love adventures, she scarcely concealed their identity.

The fact that the Princess was writing this book, and that, moreover, it was likely to be very plain-spoken, was well known, but save by her brother, the King, who himself was not spared in her often humorous recitals, none had as yet been privileged to peruse its pages.

Seeking a spot wherein she could be quite alone and away from the noises of the huge camp, Marguerite bent her footsteps towards the pavilion in which she had presided as Queen of Beauty. Mounting the steps and seating herself in the chair which she had occupied as throne, she unrolled her packet, glanced at it awhile, and sat musing thoughtfully. She was not satisfied with the last pages

which she had written ; they appeared to her somewhat tame and to savour also of repetition.

"Oh, if I could but procure some grander theme of love than any I yet have," she mused, "how I could improve this work ! Some new stories in which the heroes and the heroines do not ever play the same ignominious parts of perfidy, treachery and deception ! But from those of the Court or the foreign ambassadors I can learn but these. There must be some nobler themes of higher romance. Yet who will tell them to me in these degenerate days and in this degenerate land ?" The Princess knitted her brows and, as the shades of evening were commencing to fall, bound up her roll of papers with a golden thread and sat listlessly pondering.

"Are there then nowadays no great seigneurs, no noble dames, the story of whose love would be one of high nobility, unselfish self-sacrifice, unblemished purity, loyal devotion, whose history might serve as an example of brightness to elevate the minds of those into whose hands my volume might fall ? The love of a Bayard, for instance, might well serve as such. Of a Bayard ! ay, that would surely be ennobling. A Bayard ! but hath he a love story ? They say not, yet must he have consorted with some as noble as himself—since like seeks like—and must from their lips have heard their tragedies or comedies of love. Would that I in turn could learn them from him ! And yet, methinks, should but that noble seigneur love himself, his love would burn so true, shine with so bright and clear a flame as would dull to feeble pallor all else beside it. And knew I but the story of his true-hearted passion then 'twould, I warrant, be so great and grand no other would be needed. 'The Love of Bayard' then I'd call my book, and all that breathe would rush for it and read it, if but from very curiosity to know how Bayard loved—'twould be the seventh wonder of the world !"

The Princess rose and walked up and down once or twice with short feverish steps, then returning and seating herself once more, exclaimed feverishly and half aloud :

"Yet would I not that Bayard loved, unless, ye saints ! I scarce dare think of it ! unless—nay, even to myself I'll not breathe the thought my famished soul would cry aloud. Bayard, alas ! when I saw him kneel yonder at my feet but two short hours since, what spell was it he cast upon my heart ? And yet, when gazing in his eyes I sought to read his soul, nought read I therein save candour, high-souled honour, respect as never gleamed from eye of Bourbon or of Bonnivet. But when he held my trembling fingers to his lips, 'twas as though I were enchanted ; my heart, which from my earliest girlhood none had touched, rushed forth to meet him. Ay, 'twas more than a chain of gold I gave him all unknowing, and I have gained what in change ?—alas ! I fear, a chain of lead, no more !

"Well, I can conceal its heavy links, and now must I go, the moon hath risen, Anne will be seeking me—yet am I loth to leave this blessed peaceful spot of happy memories."

Reluctantly Marguerite rose to her feet. She was about to descend the steps when she saw the figure of a man slowly approaching through the occasional oak trees. She had nought to fear, and was about to advance to meet the stranger, whom she could see to be unarmed and clad in pourpoint and hose, when, the moon shining full upon his face, revealed the noble features of Pierre de Terrail. He was coming straight towards her when, seized by an involuntary feeling of alarm, Marguerite, who was in the shadow, dropped down, concealing herself behind the high and flag-covered balustrade at the head of the wide steps ; yet so that she was able to see by slightly separating two of the flags where their folds hung together.

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As Bayard slowly advanced the sounds of distant revelry from the Royal tent fell upon his ear. He paused and listened to them, and an expression of disgust crossed his fine features, while his thoughts ran as follows :

"How foul and low are the thoughts of men! ay, even of Princes when become hoggish through wine! The glorious juice of Bacchus they call it! To me such juice of Bacchus is as blood of swine—no longer could I stand their ribald talk; no woman's name seems sacred. And yet she whose chain this is I wear is, 'tis said, a true woman, though left all husbandless, a very angel of purity; moreover, sister of the King who leads this loathly revelry. The thought of such a one so near at hand should surely check such ill-timed ribaldry, which merely to listen to must fill all truly knightly hearts with shame." He advanced a few steps, then halting, lifted the golden chain. As the Chevalier raised the pendant links and gazed steadfastly upon them, the moonlight shone upon them and made them glitter, while Marguerite could plainly distinguish every action. Her heart commenced to flutter, she feared that he might ascend into the pavilion and discover her, and yet, not knowing her own mind, almost wished that he would do so.

As, however, Bayard remained motionless, the thoughts of the watching Princess reverting to the scene when she had placed the chain upon his neck, ran riot in her brain—she exclaimed inwardly :

"Behold him there once more, the noblest of mankind! When this day, from yonder gilded throne, I gazed into his eyes I saw his goodness there, and the very touch of his hand as he raised mine to his blessed lips rendered mine holy to myself. But did I feel holy? I know not. The blood coursed wildly through my veins with all that thrill of sweet divine passion of which the poets prate. And now, beholding him so close and gazing so intently on

the gift I gave, again my pulses quicken, my limbs tremble. Alas! this scarce is holiness, I fear—and yet 'tis heavenly—such soft emotion is from heaven sent, and for one worthy.

“But he! suspects he aught of this, or wherefore holds he so the chain that from my neck hath passed to his? Can it be, perchance, that he hath guessed that which I learned of love in that short space of time? Have, by some spell, the sweet secrets of mine inmost being passed with that trinket magically to Bayard's soul, raised in his breast an answering cry to mine? Then what shall I do? Listen to the light counsellings of the reckless Françoise, who daily mocks me for a prude? She says, and truth it is, that in this day, within our Royal Courts, men and women love how and where they will, and are blamed of none. That I, so high in rank yet all neglected, should please myself and do as others. Yet till this day virgin have I been in heart, and ne'er have listened to her idle words, nor to the vapid utterings of those who oft besought me with burning, fervent declarations. But not mine the merit if my soul hath been pure, ay, all unmoved, for none have tempted me. But now the world hath changed—my heart's no longer cold!”

Here the cogitations of the agitated Princess were interrupted, for Bayard, resuming his advance, commenced slowly to mount the steps. Ashamed and shy, fearful of being discovered, she cowered down behind the flags. As she heard the Chevalier mount almost to the topmost step, and knew that he was scarcely two feet from her, Marguerite trembled all over. She had half a mind to rise and discover herself, then thought better of it and crouched closer to the flags of the balustrade.

Bayard reached the last step but one, and there, to her infinite relief, the hidden Princess heard him pause. All thought of her Royalty had left her;

Marguerite was merely a woman as other women, albeit one with a beating heart, as she heard the man by whose presence she was thus deeply stirred drop lightly on his knees. She wondered what he was doing—would have given the world to see him now, but dared not stir. She prayed that he might be thinking of her, yet, while quivering with the sweet surrender of her new found love, scarcely dared to imagine that such could be the case.

Yet was the Seigneur de Bayard, the great and invincible knight who was withal so modest, indeed thinking deeply of the sister of King François. His brain was full of her as he knelt, musing on the events of the day as follows: "That sweet and glorious Princess! How kind and condescending was she to the weather-beaten Bayard! Yet why is it that the thought of one so high, and of her gentle grace to one so lowly, fills me with such keen emotion? 'Twas there she sat, and here I took her hand, her beauteous, shapely hand, and pressed it to my lips. It seems as if I but outstretched my arm, 'twould meet her gracious presence now!"

Here Bayard put out his hand upon the flag close to which he was kneeling. The resistance which it encountered was, had he but known it, the bosom of the Princess, who in an agony of timidity, restrained her breathing lest her presence should be revealed.

After a slight pause, however, withdrawing his hand, the Chevalier's thoughts ran on:

"Strange how this war-worn hand, so firm to grasp the lance or sword, doth tremble now! Ay, even as methought did hers what time I raised it and held it for a moment's space.

"And now, while gazing in the gloom, I seem to see once more those eyes, so gloriously kind, that dived so deep in mine, as though to ask a question, though I knew not what they asked. Those carmine lips as well, those sweetly parted lips, which spoke so gently with such winning note the while

she gave to me this precious gift; their scented breath falls yet upon my cheek, so near they were to mine!"

Raising the heavy links of the chain Bayard now held them against his lips as the current of his thought continued: "It hath a fragrant savour of her now, ay, 'tis redolent with her heavenly sweetness and, why I know not, in this place that self-same savour seems to dwell in ambient air. That sweet and thrilling sweetness floats, I vow, upon the wind of night, to penetrate my brain, to reach my heart, which pants and flutters like a woman's.

"Oh! let me search that heart that loves to run the true straightforward, not the twisted course, and find the meaning of these sweet emotions, these thrilling throbbings of the pulse and brain which till this day have ever to my senses been unknown."

Suddenly in awe-struck tones the Chevalier spoke aloud: "'Tis love! With all my soul, all my manhood, I love the Princess Marguerite. May God and all the blessed saints forgive my crime!"

Horried at the discovery that he had made, Bayard buried his face in his hands for a moment, then he rose. Even as the Princess, not knowing what impelled her, sprang to her feet, he turned and hurriedly descended the steps.

Marguerite, pale and trembling, stood with her hands clasped tightly over her beating heart.

"He loves me!" she whispered softly, "he loves me!"

She watched until she saw Bayard gain the shadow of the nearest oak, then, descending by some steps at the rear of the pavilion, with faltering footsteps walked slowly away.

CHAPTER X

FLEURANGE AND FRANÇOISE

IT was an age when the knight who was most conspicuous for brilliant feats of arms was he upon whom the ladies most willingly showered their affections, even unasked. It thus happened that the Princess Marguerite was apparently not the only woman of the French Court whose heart had been won by the prowess of Pierre de Terrail, for all the great ladies were talking of nothing else. Thus had the Chevalier been but as the other seigneurs, *un homme à bonnes fortunes*, he would merely have had to throw the handkerchief to find many of the fairest flowers of France ready to scramble to pick it up.

Such being the case, although Bayard was as remarkable for his modesty as for his bravery, he very soon became an object of the jealousy of the courtiers, and even of King François himself. For from the lips of Françoise de Châteaubriand he scarcely now heard a name save that of Pierre de Terrail, while it was easy enough for the King and others to see that the fair Comtesse was foremost among those who lost no opportunity of throwing themselves in Bayard's way. The consequence was that, while François became as sulky as a bear, the malicious Admiral lost no opportunity of trying to fan his discontent or of suggesting to his Royal friend and patron that he should early promote the young Anne de Pisseleu to the position of favourite held by the Comtesse.

Upon the Princess Marguerite the emulation shewn by the other women to obtain the notice of the Chevalier *sans peur et sans reproche* had but the effect of fanning her flame. Moreover, being the highest Princess in the land of Gaul and accustomed to having her own way, she began secretly to determine to strive by every means in her power to win for herself the only man whom she had ever loved. Had she not, she argued, the sole right to him?—had she not heard him with her own ears declare those thrilling words: “I love the Princess Marguerite, with all my soul, with all my manhood?”

Though unusually cold in demeanour to all who laid siege to her affections, the character of Marguerite was complex. She was a laughter-loving Princess, and it was by the readiness of her tongue, the humorous flashes of her wit, that she was usually accustomed to accomplish the discomfiture of those who threw themselves at her feet.

This wit and humour, as also her brilliant faculty for versifying, she doubtless inherited from the poet Duc Charles d'Orléans, through whose Italian mother, Valentina Visconti, it was that King François traced the vexed claim to the Duchy of Milan—the cause of so much bloodshed. From this mixed French and Italian blood, and likewise from her Savoyarde mother, Marguerite had, however, inherited other traits in addition to a poetic instinct. These were determination of purpose, great courage and, above all, a passionate disposition.

Of this latter she had been herself totally unaware since the time of her early marriage to a Prince who was nought but a dissolute poltroon. For this husband from whom she was constantly separated, she had never conceived aught but disgust, even in the early days of an union arranged merely as a matter of State convenience. Now, however, that her heart had flown out to meet that of the gallant Pierre de Terrail, she had, to her secret grief, but

too easily realised the passion of which her nature was capable. She could not sleep of nights, she composed odes to him in secret and lost no opportunity of feasting her eyes upon his singularly beautiful features. At the same time her heart was crushed with longing. For while on account of her rank, Marguerite was unable to seek his society with the same freedom as the other women of the Court, she suffered intensely from the fact that, upon those occasions when she found herself in his company, the Chevalier never by so much as a single look or word gave evidence of the love for her which she had, when he deemed himself alone, heard him let fall from his lips.

Suffering as she did from her concealed emotions, the Princess became somewhat embittered, with the result that her favourite young maid-of-honour commenced to find herself treated to a reprimand or a reproof for gaiety of demeanour which would hitherto have been treated but with an indulgent smile.

It was, however, with the Comtesse, with whom she was usually on such friendly terms, that, as the days succeeded one another, Marguerite commenced to feel real indignation. Never now by look or word was Françoise known to express the slightest interest in that brilliant Prince Fleurance, with whose name hers had once been so freely linked as to arouse the jealousy of the King, her open protector. What right had she now, thought the distressed Princess, openly to be doing her utmost to attract the attention of Pierre de Terrail? The fact that the Chevalier appeared to be utterly unmoved by her advances, indeed not even to be aware of them, did not improve matters in the least—it only made her conduct seem the more reprehensible in the eyes of the heart-wrung Princess.

Naturally open in her demeanour, Marguerite determined to seek an opportunity of speaking to

Françoise, if it were only to warn her beautiful friend that the line of conduct that she was pursuing was likely to be such as to arouse the anger of her brother the King.

Although Marguerite loved her unworthy brother almost to the verge of idolatry, she had severely reprobated his dishonourable conduct in the first instance towards the Comtesse, whom she had sincerely pitied. Now, however, that the latter had long since acquiesced in her position, it would, so Marguerite told herself, surely only be a kindly action to advise her not to risk falling under his displeasure. It mattered not that Françoise seemed to be so absolutely sure of her power, decidedly, she would warn her all the same.

If the interview which Marguerite arranged one evening with Françoise commenced with a certain amount of hauteur on the part of the Princess, it closed quite otherwise. It was with a hearty embrace that the two women separated, while the heretofore clouded features of the young Duchesse d'Alençon were wreathed in smiles when, after giving her many friendly counsels, the astute Françoise took her departure.

No sooner was she alone than Marguerite called Anne Boleyn to her, and received her in such an affectionate manner that the usually merry young maid-of-honour at once recovered her lightness of spirits, which had been somewhat damped during the few days that she had seemed to be out of favour with the Princess. Seated at the feet of her beloved mistress, and with her arms clasped around her knees, Anne listened attentively to certain confidences and instructions. These she received not, however, in silence, to be silent was not in her nature, but with an occasional comment of which the nature could best be described as saucily sympathetic.

While Marguerite allowed her fingers to wander

idly in the tresses of her favourite's hair, long thus they talked together, and in the meantime from the direction of the King's tent bursts of music interspersed with song gave warning that the usual nightly carousal was in progress.

Meanwhile another interesting interview was taking place, and it was not between two women. In the quiet retreat beneath the shade of the self-same oaks where Marguerite had seen Bayard wandering in the moonlight, the Seigneur de Fleurange and the Comtesse de Châteaubriand were slowly pacing up and down. The moon had not yet risen, therefore no indiscreet eye would have been able to perceive the undoubted fact that each had an arm tenderly thrown around the other.

The pair were, however, silent save for a low sobbing from the Comtesse. At last pausing, William de la Marck drew her closer to him, and gently drew the kerchief from her eyes.

"Ah! Françoise, my dear Françoise, I see that in sooth you love me as in the old days when I was, so you said, your sole comfort. Why then not listen to my words? wherefore remain here, where it is surely not for the sake of the King that you stay."

"Ay, Fleurange, I love you—none but you—you are my comforter now as then—or would be if I could see you, but alas! we meet so rarely!"—and Françoise buried her face in her lover's breast.

"Why then remain? You who are much stronger than the unhappy Queen Claude—more powerful even than Madame de Savoie, surely have strength enough to tear yourself from this Court of France where all is hollow, fickle, shallow. It is, you know it as I, a Court where naught but desertion awaits you."

The Comtesse raised her face, and speaking

lowly replied: "Willingly would I go from this Court to which the King lured me by a base trick, but whither shall I fly? My husband has vowed to murder me if ever he should catch me away from the King's protection, and François plays on this to keep me whenever I threaten to leave him."

"What hath your husband to do with you, my poor child? Long since he deserted you, left you to your fate!"

"Ay, when he might have saved me, and despite my heartfelt prayers; yet ere leaving me to the King, who stood jeering with Bonnivet, the jealous Comte vowed that some day he would open my veins, see me bleed drop by drop, or lock me up within four bare walls and from a window watch me slowly starve to death, while food and drink were placed just beyond my reach. Now when, sickened by the gibes of Bonnivet, the mean furies of Madame and the glaring infidelities of François, by which I am, although I love him not, belittled, I vow I'll turn my back on him, he mocks at me with the self-same answer: 'Go then! to meet a bloody or a lingering death!'

"You see, dear Fleurange, I am as a helpless bird in a gilded cage, without whose bars the savage cat awaits. Yet here all say: 'Oh, what a lucky woman! she rules the King.'"

"Dearest François! and do you yet rule this dishonourable monster? whose perfidy his tricky eyes so well proclaim that none could ever trust him."

"Partly I do—he finds my counsels useful and I govern him in many matters. From me he learns the petty treacheries of the Admiral, the frequent risk of greater ones from Bourbon, the secret ways in which his mother diverts to her own uses the monies of the State. I am his only safeguard. He prizes my advice, yet in his cups babbles to each

in turn how I have warned him, thus they all hate me, who scorn them. Yet how can I fly? Whom have I to help me? Whichever way I turn danger awaits me!"

Fleurange stooped down and tenderly kissed the woman in his arms.

"I will help you, my sweet bird; I vow to rescue you from this so-called ally of mine, ay, even though it should entail an open rupture. 'Twill not be the first time the La Marcks have warred with France—yet Bouillon ever proudly holds her independence, her banner floats unscathed by either King or Emperor!"

"Nay, nay, Fleurange! Not for my sake the rupture of the old time alliance which you have late renewed."

"Ay, Françoise, renewed for you—to see you once again. Now having found you, for whom alone I made it, I will break it, go and take you with me and then in open warfare fight, die for you, if need be."

"Not so, my dear one, rather than see you lead your troops against my country, France, would I remain here alone to suffer—die myself. But my beloved," here Françoise laughed a little rippling laugh, "why should we both be tragic, talk of dying? We live and love to-day, then should we not be happy? I am a woman, one, moreover, full of expedients, let us then not despair; we may find the means to be happy still without aught so drastic as a broken alliance. The King might not break his heart should I disappear some fine day. I know as well as he himself that among his mother's women he keeps hidden the young girl destined to replace me. Her name is Anne de Pisseleu—he has found her up from some place in Picardy—and she is pretty, but rather young as yet for such responsibility, and therefore would he wait awhile to make of her all that I am to him. Yet

hath he other playthings, thus I doubt if he would truly grieve my loss."

"By so much more is he then a dastard, Françoise, and my father, the Wild Boar of the Ardennes, did right to grumble fiercely when my good comrade Bayard prevailed on me to offer France alliance. Yet was I resolved to come if but as a man-at-arms in Bayard's troop, so much I longed to see how it fared with you after these long years of separation. Ay, beloved, years in which your image never once hath been absent, either in war or peace."

There was a pause, while the Comtesse expressed her thanks for this fidelity as only lovers can. Presently, however, she spoke.

"You mention the noble Bayard—I also would speak of him. Hath he not told you that I have seen much of him of late? So much indeed as to make King François almost jealous, for it hath been my plan"—here Françoise laughed—"to make it seem as though I loved the Chevalier. So well hath it worked that all the fools are deceived. But not Bayard himself, who hath, I know, partly your confidence. Yet would I learn what says he of me to you, my Fleurange?"

"He left me but now, when he was speaking of you, and most kindly, begging me, if I were indeed your friend, to induce you to leave this Court and its temptations. But he added that which if I were to say we both might smile—perchance 'twere best unsaid."

"Nay, tell me, Fleurange. I value his words and ways, even if they be not mine."

"In quitting me, he said: 'Yet see, Fleurange, my comrade, that, in causing her to leave, you tempt her not yourself.' 'Twas noble of him, he thinks but of our souls' welfare, Françoise."

"And I thank him for it from my heart—yet what reply made you to the good Chevalier?"

"None could I think of save to say that alas! we were not all Bayards."

"Nor would I have you as he in one respect, yet in all others. Where woman's love is concerned he lives beyond his age, is indeed as much prude as preux chevalier; and 'tis of that I now would speak. Bend down your ear, close to me, Fleurange," here Françoise whispered. "The Princess Marguerite is in love with Bayard, she hath given him her whole soul."

Fleurange laughed. "That is a secret I had already guessed at, sweetheart."

"Well, here is another you have not guessed, I trow—Bayard loves her also, and as deeply."

"Ye saints! you astound me indeed, Françoise! Are the heavens falling or what miracle hath transpired? I spoke to him of her some days since, merely drawing a bow at a venture as I had seen how she looked at Bayard when she paid him the honour of giving him the golden chain from her own fair neck. In laughing guise, as from comrade to comrade, I bade him go in and win where others had failed—said that if the King's sister smiled upon him he should gather the roses where he had already gathered the laurels; his answer then was not such as to bear out your words, nor to encourage me to continue."

"Why, what said the Chevalier? Gave he no sign whatever of what I am assured to be the truth?"

"Nay, indeed," laughed Fleurange. "He told me that my want of moral tone appalled him, and asked me did I not realise that the great and beauteous lady of whom I spoke was wedded wife already?"

"That would not prove that he did not love her though, Fleurange."

"Mayhap no, yet when I said that, according to the tone of all around us, she was fair game, he almost crushed me with his virtue; vowed that should the Princess even be so foolish as to look on him kindly, naught would he do to injure her honour. I answered him no more, Françoise."

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"Yet is her honour in great danger elsewhere. I have it from the King himself, who vows it would be sport to see his sister fall to Bonnivet, if but to save her from the hated Bourbon—make him look foolish. Yet would Bayard defend Marguerite from either, he needs must shew to her the love I tell you in his heart he hath, thus will she give him the right to protect her who, with her brother against her, is defenceless. His very name would then strike terror to all who would molest this dear forsaken Princess. Will not you, who love yourself, have pity on her, my beloved? persuade this all too saintly knight to act less the part of an anchorite? I vow the Princess is most unhappy, and all she needs a smile or two from him to whom her heart is given."

"Which smile, I doubt, for all my useless preachings, Bayard will never give. You know him not as I do, Françoise; rather than do that which he would consider compromised Marguerite's honour he would, loved he her or no, die in its defence."

"Then would he, while dying for her honour, sacrifice her life! I have no patience with such knights, and so will surely tell the Princess when I see her in her tent later. Now let us talk of other things—for choice of such sweet knights as you, my Fleurange, of brave seigneurs who seek to vie not with the blessed Saint Anthony." And, playfully, Françoise threw an arm around her lover's neck.

"Or of ladies fair, who would not emulate the cloistered nun," laughingly replied Fleurange. And thus happy in each other, they strolled away from the grove of oaks.

CHAPTER XI

IN MARGUERITE'S TENT

IN the large and luxuriously furnished outer apartment of her huge tent, the Princess Marguerite sat by a table, upon which a lamp in a golden pedestal threw a pleasant glow. She was listlessly turning over bundles of papers which she had been fastening together, but her mind was not on her work. Repeatedly her eye was cast across to the gloom of the doorway, and then sighing, as if in disappointment, she would turn again to her manuscripts, take them up and drop them once more.

Marguerite looked singularly beautiful as she sat thus. Her hair, being gathered up in a crown, was confined by a fillet of silver, while around her neck was a necklace of large pearls, of which the lustre scarcely rivalled the sheen of the creamy skin upon which they lay. Her robe was of white satin trimmed with silver, while upon shoes that matched the dress glittered pearls and diamonds, set in silver buckles.

At length the flap of the doorway was hurriedly lifted and Anne Boleyn, covered with a light cloak which did not conceal her dishevelled locks, came panting into the tent.

"Well, Anne!" cried the Princess, "at last you have come! Have you carried out your instructions—given your message?"

"Ay, that's safely accomplished, my Princess, but he merely went on saying his prayers and counting

his beads, although he must have heard every word that I was saying."

"What! had you not speech of him, child?"

"Bless you, no, Madame! His saucy squire L'Allègre defended the approach of a woman to that saintly tent almost with his drawn sword. 'Twas in vain that I told him I was but a very young maiden, brought up in all the proprieties; he went on behaving like an archangel trying to keep the devil out of Paradise. When I called him a dragon himself, and told him plainly that I despised all beasts of his kidney, he but laughed. He was not bad looking when he laughed, Princess!"

"But, Anne, what excuse gave he for keeping you thus rudely without?"

"Oh, merely, Madame, that the Chevalier never received ladies, and was, moreover, counting his beads. I did not believe that scamp of a L'Allègre, so put my ear to the wall of the tent, when I heard him plainly enough, for he went on with his Pater Nosters and Ave Marys until I lost patience. Accordingly, snatching myself away from that rascal L'Allègre—who will make a very proper knight some day—I put my mouth to the door of the tent and cried out my message."

"Oh! Anne, what said you? I trust you did not offend the noble Chevalier."

"How could the Seigneur de Bayard be offended, my Princess, when I called out to him that the Princess Marguerite wished to see him at once on particular business? 'Tis true that I added, on my own account, that he might not often get such an opportunity, and that therefore he would do well to hurry through the rest of his rosary!"

"You saucy girl! That was not the way in which to address such a great seigneur."

"What could I do, with L'Allègre running after me? I cried out the first thing that came into my head to the Chevalier—he holds a woman precious tight!"

"Who, girl? The Chevalier! What do you mean?"

At this Anne went into fits of laughter. "Nay, Madame!—the squire, who is really of very noble descent and will be a Viscount. But I bit his fingers, for all his nobility, when he put his arm round my neck—as he was trying to— But then I ran away from him."

"Trying to what?" inquired Marguerite, endeavouring to look severe, but smiling a little in spite of herself.

"Oh! trying to do all kinds of things to prevent me from delivering my message—he is a perfect ogre, that squire. My Princess, you do not know him as I do!"

The Princess was now angry from vexation, for what might not Bayard think of her with such a handmaiden! "Anne," she said severely, "it seems to me that you are scarcely the one to be entrusted with a message, and that instead of properly performing a confidential mission you have been indulging in an unseemly game of romps with this disorderly squire."

"Oh! Madame, a faithful squire!"

"Silence! this disorderly squire, who is as bad as yourself! Now own to the truth, girl, or never shall I depend upon you more."

Anne seized the Princess by the hand, kissed it, and while trying to look penitent, replied humbly:

"My dear mistress, I always tell the truth—to you, that is. I did romp just a very little, but it was after I had called out my message—and from diplomacy."

"Diplomacy, Anne! Would you anger me more with your nonsense?"

"Diplomacy, and successful diplomacy, worthy of His Eminence of York, my Princess. I was minded to put L'Allègre in a good humour, just to make him see that his master came. And—

and, dear Madame, I accomplished my mission, for he is coming—the squire promised me. Therefore be not angry with your little Anne”—here the young hypocrite put her kerchief to her eyes—“she is very young and knows not yet rightly how to conduct herself with men. And then, too, she suffers terribly from high spirits—may she not be forgiven, my dear mistress?”

“He is coming! Ay, you are forgiven, you naughty child, as always; but cease those crocodile tears—is my hair in order? how is my appearance?”

“Oh! my dear Madame!” cried Anne enthusiastically, “you look beautiful to-night! ay, beautiful, with a big, big B.” She clasped her little hands and stood in admiration before her now smiling mistress, then continued confidentially: “Oh! were I but a man and saw I you thus to-night, I should do it. I know I could not help myself, even although you be a great Princess.”

“Do what, you wicked little wretch? Some mischief, I’ll warrant.”

Anne giggled. “Do what that L’Allègre did to me when he caught me—but only once before I bit him, I vow. There, Madame, said I not that I ever told you the truth? Oh! would that I were a man—one particular man!”

Marguerite could not help showing in her countenance the pleasure she experienced at the admiration of her mischievous maid-of-honour, but just at that moment both of the women heard steps without. “Hush!” she exclaimed, lifting a finger.

“’Tis the Seigneur de Bayard, my Princess. I will retire and join the lady in the next apartment.”

“Nay, nay! I could not receive the Chevalier alone!”

“Then why send for him?” replied Anne roguishly “and on particular business, too! Your most discreet maid-of-honour knows her duties; she will usher him in and then render herself unseen,”

Going to the door, Anne made a ceremonious curtsy as she greeted a knight who was plainly dressed in black velvet, and unarmed save for a poniard at the left side. From his neck there depended a massive gold chain.

Preceding the visitor to the Princess at her table, with another ceremonious obeisance the maid-of-honour announced : " Your Royal Grace, the noble Seigneur de Bayard craves an audience."

" Welcome, Chevalier !" exclaimed the Princess slowly rising. She was somewhat agitated, especially as when turning to tell Anne to bring a seat for the seigneur, she found that her maid-of-honour had disappeared.

Finding herself alone with her distinguished visitor, Marguerite timidly extended her hand. " Nay, do not kneel, Sir Pierre de Terrail, I pray ! This is but an informal audience."

Bayard took the shapely hand and kissed it. He appeared to be unable to find words, but forgot to release the hand, nor did Marguerite withdraw it. They stood thus for a moment oblivious, looking at one another, then the Chevalier started and dropped the hand, but both remained uneasily standing.

As they stood thus, the Princess, who was also tongue-tied, realised how superbly proportioned was the knight—he seemed to her eyes to embody the very perfection of manly vigour in his stalwart frame. At length, glancing at the table, with its litter of papers, Bayard stammered falteringly :

" I fear that I disturb Your Highness at an unseasonable hour ? By your leave, I will withdraw."

" Nay, nay, Seigneur, I beg you remain. I wished to see you and thank you for your courtesy in coming. I trust my young maid-of-honour disturbed you not at your devotions ? It is a foolish child and somewhat flighty."

" Madame, I but was offering my evening orisons to the Great Ruler of us all. At such a moment

naught can disturb me, and scarce I heard the maiden."

"Oh, what shall I say to him?" thought Marguerite, then, raising her eyes, she remarked with a winning smile, "I trust, good Chevalier, that you remembered me in your prayers?"

"Indeed I did," replied Bayard fervently. "I commended Your Highness particularly to the guardianship of the blessed saints, and asked for every blessing upon your Royal head."

Marguerite was surprised and delighted at the fervency of the reply, which proved her uppermost in the mind of the man of whom she had made her ideal. She answered: "Did you indeed pray for me—pray that I might be happy? Oh, that your precious prayer be granted! good Seigneur! for you, who have been in many Courts, must know that 'tis not those who seem the highest placed to whom most often comes repose of mind. And yet"—the Princess smiled almost coquettishly—"prithee, tell me why should you have prayed for me at all? or even thought of me?"

"How could I help praying for her of whom I thought, or thinking of her for whom I prayed?" replied the Chevalier simply; then thinking that perhaps he had expressed himself too plainly, he added tamely, "Are not you, Madame, the sister of the King of France, to whom I have sworn allegiance?"

At this lame termination to a sentence which had begun so well, Marguerite made a little pouting movement with her lips, for she was purely feminine, and, moreover, she loved. There was accordingly a slight tinge of disappointment in her tone as, after a momentary hesitation, she observed:

"Oh, that was the reason! Well, let us be seated! Pray take that settee by my table, Seigneur de Bayard, for much do I desire the benefit of your sage advice concerning my literary labours."

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Marguerite seated herself in such a manner that, should the Chevalier do likewise, he must place himself by her side.

Although something within him rejoiced exceedingly at the idea of being thus intimately close to the all too precious Princess of his dreams, something else sounded a warning note of alarm. Thus, with deferential courtesy, he observed: "Madame, ill it befits one of my station to be seated in your august presence. Let me stand, or, better, kneel before you; thus can you explain to me the matter in hand."

The young Princess bit her lips in vexation, the colour mounted to her cheek. Almost had she replied with hauteur, when, the words that she had overheard coming to her mind, her temporary irritation vanished. A quick glance at Bayard's handsome face, above all, his flashing eye, which told a story that belied the assumed rigidity of his features, decided her reply, in a reproachful tone:

"Since you remembered me in your prayers, I thought you were my friend, my true friend, Bayard! Will you not, then, allow me to treat you as I would my friend? Unless you be here seated by my side, how can I seek your aid in my labours—how show you my work and so profit by your counsels?" Laying her hand gently on his sleeve, Marguerite added with a bewitching smile, "They tell me that you never refuse assistance to a woman!"

Feeling that gentle touch, the Chevalier's brain swam. He was no fool, and thus, though inexperienced with women, felt the intimacy of the message conveyed. How willingly would he have grasped those slender fingers in return, but, mastering his rising emotion, he replied calmly, as he seated himself: "If I can help in any way, pray command me, Princess, yet in what manner can one so ignorant as Pierre de Terrail lend his aid to one so talented?"

Having gained her immediate point, the Princess showed some animation, some of the budding author's pride, as taking up a sheaf of papers, she thrust them into Bayard's hands, remarking :

"See this book ! or rather fragment of a book, which I am compiling rather than writing—you can help me in this, for, trammelled as I am, 'tis from men of great experience like yourself that I must learn my facts."

"Of what nature is the book, Princess ?" answered the Chevalier with modest hesitation. "Unless it deal with heraldry or the laws of chivalry, with which matters he is not entirely unacquainted, the advice of Bayard is, alas ! likely to be of but poor assistance." And for the first time since he entered, the Chevalier laughed heartily at the very idea of himself as an author.

As Marguerite saw his white teeth, delighted at perceiving her guest at length apparently at ease, she laughed too for company. In that moment she felt that they had got closer together.

Not wishing to lose her advantage, she told Bayard, speaking as from friend to friend, all about her proposed work, "The Heptameron." Charmed with her voice, he listened with deep interest to all she had to say, although he certainly looked somewhat grave upon hearing that even the love affairs of various monks and friars were to be comprised in the volume. The severity of the Chevalier's features relaxed, however, as the Princess casuistically explained that her sole reason for including these amours of certain undesirable churchmen in her collection was the better to hold up to admiration and to extol those ecclesiastics who proved worthy of their sacred calling. Her hearer, was, however, still wondering in what way he could assist, when, in a wheedling manner, Marguerite begged him to aid her by the relation of any merry or tragic love adventures that had come under

his own notice in the many Courts and lands that he had visited.

Bayard was cautious in his reply. Frankly declaring that he had no personal tales of gallantry to relate, he told Marguerite that, as a God-fearing man, he rarely listened to any where his friends were concerned, lest, sinner as he was, he might be induced either to give sympathy where it were better withheld, or, being carried away by the relation of their pleasant vices, fall into the same errors himself. Finally, he asked Marguerite if she would allow him a few minutes in which to glance at her tales—at which request she expressed her pleasure.

After carefully pointing out to the Chevalier that the noble company by whom the pleasant stories were related to each other were God-fearing folk, who daily heard Mass together, and who praised virtue where it was found, the Princess left him alone with the manuscript.

Upon her return a little later from the adjoining apartment and re-seating herself by Bayard's side, he observed :

"I perceive, Princess, that the vices of the age are somewhat freely discussed in these easily flowing lines, and yet that you fail not to warn even Princes and the great of the dangers of both pride and amorous delights. I note, for instance, that, after relating the tragic death of Alessandro de Medici at the hands of the brother of the lady whose virtue he so wickedly attempted, you justly remark : 'Here is a fact, ladies, which should make you beware of that little god who delights in tormenting Princes and private persons, the strong and the weak ; and who so infatuates them that they forget God and their conscience.' How true and apt are your words, Madame !"

"Alas !" exclaimed poor Marguerite inwardly—"true indeed ! How this noble and God-fearing

man would, I fear, despise me, knew he but how at this minute those words apply to the writer of those lines ! ”

“ I greatly commend your words, Princess,” continued Bayard, “ for save where love be virtuous, as in the married state, do not the works of that same Cupid too often resemble those of Satan, to mislead the hearts of men, whatever their degree ? ”

“ Greatly do you please me by your commendation, Bayard,” answered Marguerite, smiling with pleasure—“ yet is that wicked little Cupid a very rascal to fight against, and, alas ! poor men, ay, and women too, go down far too oft before his rankling arrows. What think you of the further remark in the same sad history with regard to those in authority outraging those beneath them ? ”

“ There, Madame, I am likewise of your opinion, yet should not those of lesser rank presume, by raising their eyes in unlawful love to those above them. The ills from such behaviour I see you have justly portrayed, in the story of the unbridled passion, of that brave seigneur, Amadour for Florida, the virtuous daughter of a Princess whom you disguise under the name of the great Countess of Aranda. Yet do not I now presume myself, who venture to remain seated here by your side and criticise your brilliant labours ? May God forbend that I should even seem distantly to follow in the footsteps of the valiant Amadour.”

Marguerite, who wished with all her heart that Bayard would indeed follow Amadour's example in declaring his rash love, thought how differently to that hero he would be treated were but such the case, ere she replied, laughingly :

“ Chevalier, even should such be the dreadful fact, see you not that there is a paragraph expressly to excuse that brave seigneur ? Nor would I greatly blame Amadour for his temerity ; he could not control his heart, either before or after the marriage

of Florida to the unworthy Duke of Cardona, and ever remained faithful. Florida again, despite her cruel and excessive virtue, loved only Amadour in secret."

"Then, Princess, her marriage should never have taken place. However great that lady, she should have espoused none but Amadour! 'Twas hers, perchance, that was the greater sin!"

"Alas! Bayard, how can we unhappy Princesses help to whom they marry us? They forget that we are women, with hearts that burn and throb—they forget that when neglected or spurned we wither and die. Ah! friend, I am of one mind with you. Where true love is concerned, no false barrier should exist!"

There was such vehemence, such bitterness in Marguerite's tones, that Bayard felt himself carried away with indignation. In his pity, temporarily forgetting their mutual position, he grasped the hand of the Princess, which lay very near his own on the table.

"Ah! Madame," he exclaimed, "may God protect your precious heart from a single pang, whatever others may be doomed to suffer." Perceiving that Marguerite was warmly returning his pressure, and that her eyes were fixed upon his with an appealing, tender glance, he reddened, became confused. His conscience struck him, he felt that he was doing wrong; hurriedly, therefore, to hide his shame, he relaxed his clasp, and, turning another page of the manuscript, read once more aloud, and continued to do so for some time.

The Princess, however, who was trembling all over with delight, heard not a single word—it was with a start that, at length, she came to herself, to realise that the Chevalier was directly addressing her, while discussing what he had just read.

"And yet, Madame, you, a woman, having penned these lines, must have looked at the matter from

both sides? Would not a great lady be justly offended at the arrogance of the gentleman who assumed the right in private to talk to her of love as though he were her equal? Reprove me, I pray, if I seek to probe too deeply, yet have you turned these phrases so well, with such evident knowledge of the human heart, I fain would hear you on this point."

Marguerite looked long and fixedly at Bayard, as she replied, while carefully weighing her words: "My friend, any woman who truly loves one noble, chivalrous, and brave, unlike this Florida, who was for all her rank but a foolish little prude, would willingly be mastered by him to whom she had given her heart, well knowing him worthy of the greatest gift woman can bestow."

For the second time that evening the Princess laid her hand upon Bayard's arm. This time it was with a gentle but emphatic pressure upon his wrist, as she enquired, "And do you not think, Chevalier, that she would do right?"

The gracious touch thrilled Bayard to the core; it throbbed through his veins, nor would politeness this time allow him to withdraw his hand. Courageously, however, he determined to reveal no sign of his feelings, as he answered: "So that she maintain the purity which is woman's greatest jewel, and break not an oath given to another in the saintly sacrament of marriage, she would do right to give her hand to him to whom her heart had gone. But this Florida had a husband and was therefore most virtuous."

Marguerite felt indignant. Why should this man whom she knew loved her, and whom she longed for now more than ever, with a love that was a consuming passion, prate to her like this? Almost snatching away her hand, she spoke impatiently.

"A husband! A miserable wretch to whom, while loving another, she was forcibly united to serve the selfish ends of those around her!

Virtuous! the word is too often but a mere shibboleth. Was it an act of virtue, think you, Bayard, to drive to his death him whom she nourished in her heart, one who had, moreover, for years shown plainly that he but lived for her dear sake—that all life without her was a blank?”

Bayard, had he been a weak man or small, would have replied in the sense that he now fully realised would please this august young lady, who treated him all too kindly. But he was great, and he thought therefore of her soul, of his own, of her youth and inexperience, in spite of her rank. Accordingly, he forced himself to reply to her almost impassioned appeal in a manner which he felt alone to be worthy of a Christian knight.

“Madame, whatever Amadour’s feelings, I vow he did most wrongly. The more he loved her, the greater was his duty to conceal from the young lady, Florida, his unhallowed passion. Never by look, glance, or action should he have allowed another’s wife to dream of the sentiments that he nourished. He should have prayed for heavenly guidance to help him crush, as ’twere some foul reptile, his unholy love. Then dying as he had lived, fighting against his country’s foes, would I have called that Amadour a most virtuous knight.” The Chevalier paused, then looking up, added fervently, “May the blessed saints help Bayard to practise as he preacheth, so to live and so to die!”

Marguerite would not, however, yield her point. Her young heart, thirsting for emancipation, could not without a struggle consent to sentiments that were against the spirit of the time, sentiments which seemed to render impossible for her all thought of eventual bliss. She argued: “But good Bayard, if he knew that the lady loved him above all other, for very pity’s sake, you would not have him live and die, and give her ne’er a sign?—think how ’twould wound her!”

Bayard was, however, inexorable, and answered accordingly. "For very pity's sake, Princess, ay, even for his great love of her, 'tis thus a chivalrous gentleman should behave. Far more greatly would he wound her should he do otherwise—she might be gained to wrong and thus her soul imperilled."

The Princess rose from her seat. Taking from Bayard that sheaf of papers containing the story they had been discussing, she nervously tied them together in a roll, as she paced slowly up and down on the other side of the table to that by which Pierre de Terrail now respectfully stood. Marguerite glanced at him, sadly thinking. "His sentiments are noble—I should applaud them—but alas! too noble! but little comfort bring they to one who heard him vow he loved her so. What! would he die and never own that love to the woman who hungers for it? Can I find naught to move him?"

Turning, she addressed the man by whom she was so deeply troubled. "Bayard, most virtuous of knights, listen! My own case is that of the Florida of this history. The husband to whom, a mere child, I was delivered is, however, less worthy even than was this so-called Duke of Cardona. At his identity you can guess, he was no poltroon, and, as well you know, died on the battlefield. The name of d'Alençon, my spouse, with whom my wedlock is but farce, a very mockery of Hymen, is breathed by all men with contempt, since all men call him coward. Nor makes he pretence to keep the marriage vow, to him all women are the same, but not his wife!"

Marguerite paused, sighed deeply, then continued. "His wife—unfortunate being—is despised by this luxurious, pleasure-loving Prince. She is, he says, too learned, reads Greek and Latin, speaks above his head, studies the latest religious doctrines of the day. He hath no use for such a woman!—therefore seeks he his pleasures where he need not think."

As Marguerite, with heaving bosom, and eyes in which sorrow struggled with indignation, stood facing the Chevalier, he felt himself carried away with rage. Ill would it have gone with the man of whom the Princess spoke as, with those marvellous eyes before which his enemies quailed flashing fire, he vehemently exclaimed: "He is a villain!—a very villain! With all respect, oh, most ill-used of womankind, Bayard would offer deepest, truest sympathy. Oh! would that man stood now before this dagger's point, then swiftly, surely, you should be avenged indeed."

As Pierre de Terrail, his hand upon his dagger's hilt, stood thus, breathing fury before her eyes, Marguerite realised what he must be like in the moment of battle, and her admiration, if possible, increased. Almost was she herself terrified at his noble aspect in his anger—anger kindled on her own behalf! Yet she had more to say to him, ay, words that haply might raise in this warrior's breast a softer mood—an attitude more sweetly satisfying to one of the softer sex.

Seating herself, and motioning to Bayard to do likewise, the Princess addressed him, speaking in low and thrilling accents, scarcely above a whisper.

"You pity me! oh, you pity me my loveless life, and from my heart I thank you, Bayard. Yet, tell me this, you who are so great and true. Should it so chance that love, though all unsought, should come my way, as the light that illumines the dark waters of a stormy sea may brighten the path for the storm-tossed mariner—then should not I, all derelict, turn to that love, that light, nurse it, bask in its welcome ray? Or would you have me extinguish the light with a ruthless hand, leave myself in chaos that is worse than darkness?"

Bayard was astounded at this question. Although previously he had duly appreciated the gentle ad-

vances of the Princess, he had but put them down to the natural coquetry of a beautiful woman. He had had many others at the Court make far bolder advances to him and thought them no more. As for imagining that Marguerite could actually be in love with himself his innate modesty recoiled at the very thought. He now therefore wondered—"Whom is it that she loves?" and the question came to him as a sword stab in the heart.

The Chevalier was, however, calm enough outwardly as he responded. "Madame, you speak of a light, but is not the light you think of sent by the powers of evil, to make easy the road that leads to perdition? Shun that light, I say! Better far to abide in the darkness of chaos, and turn for guidance to Him whom the blessed Scriptures tell us brooded over chaos until, in His good time, He shaped it to the fair world we dwell in. Ah, fair Princess! believe me I beseech, thus only shall you find content, and thus the Great Spirit of love shall lead your firm footsteps to the abode of bliss hereafter."

"But friend," replied Marguerite, "'tis surely that Great Spirit of love who would also see his children happy now. And since 'tis He alone by Whom our hearts are inspired here below with love, why should not I listen to His commands to love one worthy? For I would have you know, Bayard, that he whom I love is noble, he is great, he is good; he is bold in war, a loyal friend, an honourable foe. He is a God-fearing man, one kind to women and children, generous to the poor, one who hath never been guilty of a mean action and whose hand it is an honour to have touched! Now tell me, should I extinguish the light that leads me to such a man?"

Bayard remained a moment wrapt in thought, then answered meditatively: Truly a God-like man! Would that I knew him, then might I answer better—I own myself perplexed. Where,

Princess, can this man be found? I would the honour of his acquaintance."

"None, Chevalier, know him better than yourself, you are with him daily. Can you not guess his name?" Marguerite laughed lowly as she realised that her riddle, so simple to herself, was a puzzle to Bayard. Yet, with a woman's contradictions, she loved him the more that he did not, as many a more self-sufficient man might have done, immediately apply her panegyrics to himself.

Far from this, Pierre de Terrail simply said: "Princess, I own myself dumbfounded. His name I beg of you! Pray give me the name of this noble friend of mine, who is indeed doubly honoured since you think of him so highly."

"Then must I tell it you, I ween. The name of this hero, this noble gentleman whom God hath put it in my heart to—to love and honour as he deserves—is, is—" her voice faltered, "nay, I fear I cannot reveal it, my friend, you will have to divine my secret, it is too sacred to pass my lips!" Marguerite placed her hand on her heart, rose slowly, and turned away to hide her emotion.

As Bayard also rose to his feet, the sound of voices and some scuffling was heard without. With an alarmed expression, the Princess turned and looked at Bayard, while raising a hand to impose silence.

CHAPTER XII

THE DANGER OF MARGUERITE

“Those tones!” exclaimed the Princess — “the voice of Bonnivet, my brother’s ignoble favourite! What does he here at this hour, and what that struggling with the sentinel without? Surely the too frequent wine-cup in the King’s tent hath bemused his brain, and hence some foolish freak.”

“Nay, stay,” she added, as Bayard was about to proceed to the door to investigate, “’twill be by François’ order he hath come, and he, ’tis plain, would enter. Nor would I that he, vain babbler that he is, should find you here. Withdraw, I pray, my friend, within the next apartment, where are some ladies — alone will I receive this pretty Admiral of France.”

Bayard wished, however, to stand his ground; he expostulated:

“Madame, naught is there to fear, for honest hearts can see no wrong in that I pay my duty to one so highly placed. I will assist you, therefore, with my services.”

“Nay! nay! his is no honest heart. Go quickly! I beg, Bayard! Anne! Anne!”

As the maid-of-honour hurriedly entered, Marguerite continued, scarce knowing in her agitation what she said: “Go quickly with her, if you love me! I will call you if I need assistance. Quick! take him, Anne.”

Anne hurried the Chevalier off with her through

the heavy embroidered velvet hangings which formed the doorway to Marguerite's sleeping apartment, and, even as the portière fell behind them, Bonnivet, who was flushed with wine, entered, and advanced with strangely familiar gait towards the Princess.

She drew herself up proudly. "What means this untimely intrusion?" she demanded with freezing hauteur. "Is this an hour at which, all unannounced, to force the way into the tent of your Sovereign's sister? Begone! Monsieur l'Amiral! nor seek to repeat your former insolence, lest ill should come of it!"

"No ill, save a few scratches on my face, came of it the last time I paid you an evening call, my pretty Princess," replied Bonnivet, laughing insolently, "and, since on this happy occasion I come by the King's command, I trust you will spare me another such unkind reception. Now prithee come with me, the King requires your presence."

"My brother wants me now, at this hour?"

"Ay, sweet angel from the celestial spheres, too beauteous for this nether world, that does he; he hath the toothache, sweetheart, therefore come with me!" Bonnivet, as he spoke, placed his arm in a caressing manner around the Princess, who angrily snatched herself away from him and stood with blazing eyes, as the Admiral, speaking somewhat thickly, continued: "Ay, come along with me, pretty Princess, no time is there to lose; his toothache is most violent, and none he says save his beloved Marguerite can soothe it. I will aid you with my arm. Oh! a toothache is a terrible thing, in a King as in a cowboy! therefore let us waste no time, pretty sweeting, for by none but a sister can such a malady be stayed. Be thankful that you have it not yourself, 'tis truly awful!" Bonnivet laughed in an idiotic manner, and once more he attempted to approach the Princess, but she, placing herself behind the table, eluded him, while replying furiously:

"Sieur de Bonnivet, you are even more insolent than usual, and further, I vow you are a liar!"

"No hard words! Pretty angel, he hath sent me for you, I tell you."

"A liar, I repeat—a cruel liar, moreover, who would play upon my feelings, my love for my brother, from whom, if indeed in pain, you know full well I could not remain absent. Yet, if you be a man, speak the truth, why are you come? What would you? Have you indeed a message? Is not perchance your brain too full of the fumes of wine to remember the errand on which you came?"

"Nay, I lie not, lovely one, nor have I had more than a cup or two, just what a seigneur should drink with his King. I can remember my errand well enough—I mean my message, dear girl. I have it with me; see, here it is in writing—a little letter, almost like a billet-doux."

"A letter from the King—shew it to me, you insolent wretch!"

"Ay, know you not the handwriting? A bit shaky, yet scarce could he write, such was his pain. The King vowed he could not see! 'Tis an eye tooth; the nerves of his eye were all twisted round the wrong way. Oh! a terrible sight, my pretty Princess, in a King as in a cowboy. Ha! ha! forgive me for laughing—he looked so droll, made such grimaces!"

"Give me the letter—nay, place it on the table yonder!" exclaimed Marguerite, warily keeping her distance from the insolent seigneur, whom, from her previous experiences, she knew to be capable of any outrage. Picking it up and reading it she remarked: "Shaky indeed, but the King's writing! Oh! cease that foolish laughing!" she continued, stamping her foot, "or I will not come with you, although in very sooth he begs my presence with urgency."

"You will come with me, then, my charming Princess?—that is right. You have good taste

and know, moreover, how I adore you. Be not afraid that I will treat you like d'Alençon and fly off after a new light o' love in every corner. Nay, nay, you shall find me a very faithful lover. Ha! ha! ha! we will have a Royal time together."

"I come with you! you coxcomb! a Royal time together! You whom I despise of all men! Are you intoxicated, *Sieur de Bonnivet*? Is perchance my brother the King as you are, to have sent you? What, sir, means this red smudged mark upon his letter? Tell me, an you can see."

"Red mark! I can see two red marks! 'Tis where the wine upset; nay, nay, 'tis blood got on it when I cut the King's lip trying to draw for him his toothachy tooth with the corkscrew. Oh! you would have laughed, pretty one, at his grimace. We all laughed—he laughed himself more than all. The Cardinal of York—lively old boy that, although English!—swore it reminded him of Pope Leo X. with the gout, when, on a hunting expedition, the pretty farmer's daughter kicked His Holiness on the wrong foot under the table. Screamingly funny, eh? Holloa, what's that—a divan? Gadzooks! I'll take a rest while you get your cloak—hurry up, pretty *Marguerite*, remember your poor brother's agonies are awful."

Lurching across the apartment, the Admiral threw himself full length upon the cushioned sofa, and, commencing instantly to breathe heavily, appeared to fall asleep. *Bonnivet* was not, however, quite so drunk as he pretended to be; he knew well what he was about, and was really watching *Marguerite* furtively, although, as he lay like a log in the shade, she was unable to perceive that the insolent fop's eyes were partly open.

Marguerite was in a terrible quandary—she knew not what to do. Always having been in the habit of obeying her brother's lightest wish as a command, she knew not how to disregard his written message

to her to come to him. On the other hand, she would not go with the Admiral, nor would she leave him alone in an intoxicated condition in her tent. He might sleep there till morning, and her reputation would then be ruined for ever. To call in Bayard from the other apartment, her sleeping chamber, to eject Bonnivet would but be to make matters worse. She dreaded the Admiral's poisonous tongue. Uncertain how to behave, she cautiously approached the sleeping man and, while watching him, wondered the true significance of his nocturnal visit. Could it, she wondered with a sinking of the heart, be some horrible plot, in which her brother was concerned, to cause her to lose her honour? Well she remembered how François had merely laughed, as at a good joke, when on a previous occasion she had but narrowly escaped from the Admiral's insults. Much as she loved her unworthy brother, she knew only too well that from him she would gain neither protection nor redress, whatever Bonnivet might do.

At length the Princess made up her mind. She would not leave her tent that night. If her brother were indeed suffering—and she was inclined to doubt it—he could send for the Queen, or anyone whom he might choose, but, for once, she would not go. Without disturbance or *esclandre*, however, she must induce Bonnivet to leave—that would be the best and only plan. She crept a little closer to him; he seemed sound asleep. She must wake him!

“Monsieur de Bonnivet!” she called. He made no answer. When he made no reply upon her calling a second time, the Princess became exasperated and lost all discretion. Seizing the Admiral by the arm, she shook it, exclaiming at the same time angrily: “Get up, you drunken hog and begone! or I will send to call the guard.”

In a second, with a bound, the Admiral was off the divan, both his arms were around her! “The

old hog will kiss his little sucking pig," he exclaimed and in a second the wretch made good his words by violently embracing her. Nor could the unfortunate Princess cry for assistance, for Bonnivet stuffed a large kerchief so tightly into her mouth as almost to suffocate her. At the same time he called out but not loudly: "Come in, gentlemen! bring the silken ropes!" whereupon two squires rushed in, and while the Admiral continued tightly to gag Marguerite, the squires wound and knotted two long silken ropes around her arms and legs, despite her struggles, soon rendering her perfectly powerless. By the Admiral's orders, these men did their work in silence.

Bonnivet meanwhile continued to taunt his helpless prey and to inform her, with low but ribald laughter, that this time she was his, further that she should not escape him, as a coach was in waiting to bear her with him to a sweet little nest, when he would teach her what true love really was! Oh, he would be most loving.

The two squires, by Bonnivet's direction, at length lifted the Princess, one holding her feet the other her shoulders, and commenced to carry her off. Feeling sure of his prey at last, and noticing that Marguerite's face had become so white that he imagined she was about to faint, the scoundrelly Admiral, who thought further caution unnecessary, removed the handkerchief from her mouth.

She gasped once or twice for breath, without being, however, able to utter a sound, so nearly indeed had she been to becoming unconscious. Then, in an agony of fear of the terrible outrage about to be perpetrated on her, she made a fearful and successful effort to cry out.

"Bayard! Bayard! help! help! Save me!"

"She wants the psalm-singing Chevalier, my boys! A good joke! much use he would be to her!" laughed Bonnivet. "Off with her to the coach. I'll gag her again first though."

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As once more he was stuffing the gag into the mouth of the Princess, Bayard, like a lion, burst into the apartment followed by the Comtesse and Anne Boleyn. With two blows of his poniard, he stretched the unfortunate squires upon the floor beside the bound and writhing Marguerite, leaving the weapon sticking up to the hilt in the body of one of them. Then he threw himself upon Bonnivet, whom he seized furiously by the neck. There was a short sharp struggle, during which Bayard dealt the Admiral several mighty blows, which knocked all the wind out of him and covered his face with blood, and then he had him, too, on the floor, and his foot upon him to keep him quiet in case he should attempt to rise.

"Look to the Princess! unbind her at once!" Bayard cried to the two women, who were standing helplessly wringing their hands. It was time indeed that they gave poor Marguerite assistance, for no sooner had she realised that she had been rescued than she lost consciousness.

When, after but a short time, the Princess, who had been laid upon the divan, opened her eyes once more, with a sigh, she beheld the Admiral lying, his wrists and ankles securely bound with one of the two silken ropes with which she had been herself secured. Anne Boleyn and Françoise de Châteaubriand were kneeling by Marguerite's side, bathing her face, and Anne was weeping vociferously.

Hearing the Princess sigh, Bayard moved to her. In his hand he carried the other silken rope, which he had found unnecessary for the purpose of binding his defeated opponent.

Placing himself on his knee by the divan, the Chevalier devoutly thanked God that she was alive, for he had indeed feared that the Princess Marguerite had died as the result of the brutal treatment to which she had been subjected.

"My preserver!" was all that Marguerite could

ejaculate, while feebly extending her hand—and her eyes were full of grateful tears.

“I have been but God’s agent to save you from this villain. Would that it had been he that had been slain, instead of these unhappy squires. Yet can we punish him as he merits—you shall be avenged, Madame, for that the miscreant laid his unholy hands upon your person. This silken rope with which you were so foully bound, will answer our purpose. I have made a noose upon it, ’twill suffice to send him to answer for his crimes. Maiden, prithee hold the end, while I string it round this false knight’s neck—’twill serve as collar for him!”

With alacrity, Anne jumped up and took hold of the loose end, while Bayard, none too gently, placed the noose over the head of the prostrate Admiral, who lay scowling, with a horrible expression of malignity on his countenance.

“Now, Madame,” continued Pierre de Terrail, “vengeance is in your hands! yourself can pull that cord and his black soul flies!”

Marguerite sat up. “He deserves a thousand deaths,” she exclaimed.

“Anne, give me the rope! my whole flesh creeps yet with his unhallowed touch. ’Tis horror to think of what he more intended! One pull I’ll give our gallant Admiral, if but in part payment of his foul embraces.”

Taking the end of the cord, the Princess gazed with hatred on Bonnivet. Gazing thus, her blood still boiled with outraged modesty, and the recollection of the fact that twice now had she been the subject of his villainous attempts upon her Royal person.

There was no pity for the bound captive, only cruel hardness in her violet eyes as, slowly tightening the rope, she said coldly to the prisoner:

“Do you wish to question my right to take

vengeance for your insults? Speak while you can —your time is short to live!”

Feeling the cord tightening on his throat, Bonnivet made a grimace. He determined, however, to add one more insult ere the pressure on the windpipe became too intense to admit of his speaking.

“I say,” he gurgled out, “that you would do wisely to let your hangman from Savoy do his own throttling, and quickly, lest assistance come and his victim bruit it aloud that the noble Bayard was discovered by him with you in your bedchamber! Probably ’twas not for the first time either!”

Anne rushed forward. “Oh! the liar! when ’twas the Comtesse with whom he there bore company, and in my presence! Give me the rope, Madame, I’ll stop his wicked slanderous calumnies!”

Snatching the cord from the weak hands of the Princess, the strong young English girl gave it a tremendous jerk with both hands. She pulled so violently as almost to dislocate the Admiral’s neck, and caused his tongue to protrude. Anne, in her fury, was about to give another violent pull, when Bayard took the cord from the maid-of-honour, pushing her gently but firmly backwards.

So infuriated was Anne, however, that she begged the Princess to bid the Chevalier finish off the outrageous villain, for whom she declared hanging to be far too good. Françoise, with a cold light in her eye, now stepped forward to Bonnivet’s side. She, above all women, should have desired to see him die, if but as an act of just retribution for the manner in which he had caused her own life to be wrecked. She had, however, a spark of pity left for her enemy, to whom she said: “Admiral de Bonnivet, ’twas at my desire that the Princess sent for the Seigneur de Bayard hither. Own then your fault, and humbly implore her forgiveness if you would live, and I, your enemy, will beg her spare you, yet know I not if she will have mercy.”

Bonnivet did not want to die—and death seemed very near to him at that moment, especially after having been almost choked by Anne Boleyn, who had indeed left him black in the face.

“I own I was mistaken,” he stammered. “’Twas too much wine led me astray! I ask for pardon from Madame d’Alençon.”

Françoise turned to the Princess. “’Tis for you to decide, dear Marguerite. You have suffered cruelly at his hands, yet hath he had some punishment. Can you find it in your heart to spare his life? Look upon him and give your judgment.”

“Lend me your arm, Françoise, and assist me to rise,” responded Marguerite. She formed a pathetic but beautiful figure as, with her long brown hair now hanging loosely, and dress torn and disarranged, she staggered to the side of the Admiral.

It was a terrible scene which now for the first time was the Princess able distinctly to survey. Two squires, their faces twisted in the contortions of a violent death—one on his face, one on his back—lay weltering in pools of blood amid her rich gold embroidered rugs. The Admiral bound, his face all bloody, and by him Bayard, silent, grimly standing and holding the rope, of which one end was noosed round the neck of the man upon whom she was called to pass her judgment. The two white-faced women, her friend and her handmaiden, completed the ghastly scene, which it but depended on her word to render more ghastly still.

For a full minute, without a word, the Princess looked and thought of what this man had made her suffer. She thought also of what she would have become—his polluted plaything!—but for Bayard. ’Twas hard for her to breathe forgiveness—it was not, moreover, an age when Royal persons were given to overmuch mercy for heinous crimes attempted on their person. Should she now let go this enemy, whom she held at her mercy at her feet,

well she knew that no punishment would be meted out to him by her brother. He might repeat the offence—'twould be for the third time! And on that third occasion no Bayard might be at hand to save her—the villain might be successful in his vile designs, thus might she by mercy work her own downfall. Of all these things thought the young Princess in that solemn moment of silence, and, thinking, her heart was in an agony lest she should not come to the right decision. At length she determined to place the fate of Bonnivet in other hands. Turning to the Comtesse, Marguerite said in thoughtful, measured accents :

“ Françoise, I tremble to think, save for the noble Chevalier de Bayard, what might even now have been my degradation ! To this gentleman, all helpless as I am, I commit the future protection of the honour which, by God’s help, he hath preserved, and likewise in his hands I place the question of vengeance. Chevalier ! you are my protector, this man is your prisoner. My noble preserver ! do you pronounce the sentence ! ”

Before speaking in reply, merely making a sign to Anne to come to him, Bayard dropped the end of the rope. He whispered to her by the doorway of the tent, and, as she passed without, he returned. Picking up once more the silken cord, the Chevalier somewhat tightened it. At the same time he plucked his own dagger from the body of the dead squire, and also motioned to the Princess to pick up Bonnivet’s poniard, which was lying unnoticed by her feet. Mechanically Marguerite obeyed, and then with beating hearts both she and Françoise watched Bayard as, his bloody weapon in hand, he stood over the prisoner, who was now half dead with fright.

So severe was Bayard’s mien that the Princess dared not question him. She knew not what he would do, but felt that even were he to command

her to plunge the weapon that she held into the Admiral's heart, she must unhesitatingly obey him.

The Chevalier remained thus for several minutes, without uttering a sound. Although the now trembling women knew it not, he was praying to a Higher Power for guidance. At length, as the distant tread of armed men could be heard, Pierre de Terrail, pointing with a solemn gesture at Bonnivet, broke the painful silence :

"Better far had it been that he had died than these two poor squires, who were but the humble instruments of his wicked will ! Yet will their blood be on his head not mine, and conscience his monitor when missing them from their accustomed places. Madame ! although well this dastard knight deserve to die for the great wrong he hath done you, I cannot in cold blood slay a fallen foe. You, oh most wronged Princess, have made me judge, yet is there one Great Judge above us all. 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord !'—and to His Maker in His good time I leave this man's punishment."

Anne had already returned, and crept in noiselessly in time to hear Bayard's noble words.

He made now a sign which the quick-witted maid-of-honour understood, and in another moment six of the corps of archers, whom she had summoned from the King's guard-tent, filed in behind her. To these Bayard commanded :

"Archers, unbind that man, and see him to his quarters. Remove these two poor bodies likewise. It is by the order of Madame yonder—the sister of your King !"

Saluting respectfully, the astonished guards obeyed the order given.

When Bonnivet, having been unbound and assisted to rise, had slunk without a word from the presence of the outraged Princess, and the archers had retired, Bayard addressed Marguerite.

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“ Rest in peace ! Madame. None shall enter this door tonight, save over my dead body ! ”

Saying that she would remain with the Princess that night, Françoise passed within with her friend, after both had bidden a tender farewell to the noble Chevalier.

CHAPTER XIII

WHO IS THE SPY ?

ON the following morning the buzz of what had taken place was over the whole camp, for the tongues of six archers can go fast, and their comrades of the guard had likewise seen the discomfited Admiral being escorted in sorry plight past the guard-tent. Then, too, there were the two squires to be buried. They had many friends in the camp, and their death made an immense sensation. Since none knew exactly what had happened, some were inclined to blame Bayard for having slain the squires, while asserting that the knight had been for an improper purpose to meet the Comtesse de Châteaubriand in the tent of the Princess. Others told stories nearer the truth, and severely blamed the Admiral. Thus the whole huge French camp was simmering with excitement, the rumour of which soon spread to the English camp, where the sensation was greatly enjoyed.

Cardinal Wolsey, who had highly paid spies of all ranks, some even among those highest placed at the French Court, had, independently of others, very early received an almost accurate account of the affair from Anne Boleyn.

This young lady saw no harm in giving to her lawful Monarch, through his Chancellor, the information which was demanded of her ; and had not the great Cardinal of York when riding over shortly after daylight to enquire for the Princess, even paid

Anne the compliment of asking for a few minutes' of private conversation on the scene of the last night's fracas? In that interview much had passed, but naturally Anne, who was loyal as steel to Marguerite, only put the complexion upon the affair which had, without reference to Bayard, been decided upon between the women. This was that the Comtesse had sought a private interview with the knight of Savoy, with whom she wished greatly to hold converse concerning her brother, Thomas de Foix, Seigneur de Lescun, with whom he had recently met in Italy. This was partially true, and, at any rate, Françoise was anxious to keep up the fiction of her being somewhat smitten with the Seigneur de Bayard. By Anne, the heroism of the Chevalier and the story of how he had saved Marguerite from the Admiral were therefore graphically described, while not a word to imply that the Princess had sent for Bayard on her own account was allowed to transpire.

Wolsey was daily more anxious to secure the Chevalier's services for England, and, in consequence, gave to Anne certain hints and suggestions for her conduct later, the full significance and import of which her girlish brain was not sufficiently astute to understand.

If Cardinal Wolsey were up early, King François was not; he had drunk deep on the preceding night, and when he awoke it was with a splitting headache. He was therefore in the very worst of tempers—by the time that those around him were able, by degrees, to allow to filter through to his brain, some kind of a garbled version of the incidents that had occurred in his sister's tent. From them he could make out but little. Recollecting but vaguely what had taken place between Bonnivet and himself when they had last parted, François did not commit himself by any comments, but sent a message to demand the presence of the Comtesse de Châteaubriand.

From the Comtesse the King learned enough to make him angry with everybody concerned in the last night's affair, himself included. For his own selfish reasons, which were complex, he had wished Bonnivet to be successful in carrying off his sister, and was vexed because he considered that, owing to the too frequent passing of the wine-cup between himself and his favourite, the Admiral had mismanaged the business. With the Comtesse he was angry, because, owing to her absurd penchant for Bayard, of which he had seen latterly what he considered to be proofs, she had caused the presence of the knight of Savoy in his sister's tent at an unseasonable hour. With Bonnivet he was angry, because he had failed in temporarily relieving him of Marguerite, when, partly out of petty spite against the Constable de Bourbon, he had approved of his so doing, and with Bayard he was, above all, furious, for the part that he had played, whereby his favourite Bonnivet had been made to look a fool. As for his sister Marguerite, he was angry with her for not having gone off quietly with Bonnivet, and more angry still because he knew that it would be perfectly impossible for him to give vent to his displeasure where she was concerned.

As usual, when in a fix, and that he was in one now he realised, despite his displeasure with her, he allowed Françoise to dictate to him his line of conduct. Either, she told the King, he must disgrace the Admiral at once—behead him or banish him for ever—or, since he would be sure to be accused, he must accept openly his share of complicity in Bonnivet's offence. She told François that in the latter case he must declare that the whole affair had been of the nature of a practical joke upon his sister, one initiated by himself when under the influence of wine, and that the Admiral had but been his tool.

Of the two lines of conduct, Françoise strongly recommended the former—but she told the King that if he preferred the latter, the only way in which he could stop tongues from wagging would be to send for the Admiral, proceed with him publicly to the tent of the Princess Marguerite, and there together make humble apology for an ill-timed jest.

The King absolutely refused either to disgrace or behead his favourite, and decided upon the second course. Bonnivet therefore was sent for, when, such was the condition that he was in, he had to be brought to the King's tent in a litter. In the presence of the Comtesse, the crestfallen Admiral had not a word to say, but was compelled humbly to comply with the instructions which she dictated.

These were that, another litter having been summoned for the King, he was to proceed in state, surrounded by his guards, and followed by Bonnivet, to his sister's tent, and there make the amende honorable.

While the necessary arrangements were being made for this public apology, taking her leave of the King, the Comtesse preceded him to the Princess, to prepare her for the coming visit, and further to warn Marguerite that, for the sake of avoidance of scandal, it would be wise for her to appear to accept the proffered explanation as being *bonâ fide*. Moreover, in order that the complexion which it was proposed to give to the affair should become more widely known, Françoise warned Marguerite to summon all her household to be ready with her in order to receive the King.

While affairs were going on in this manner, one which seemed so satisfactory to Françoise, and which was accepted by the Princess Marguerite as the best solution of a difficulty, the King and Bonnivet were left together. Neither of these two was prepared to accept defeat quite as easily as the Comtesse imagined, and therefore no sooner

were they alone than they concocted a little plan which was not in the programme arranged by Françoise. Before starting on his visit to his sister, the King accordingly sent to demand the presence of the Constable de Bourbon, with whom he held a private interview. An hour or so later, in another part of the great camp, the squire L'Allègre might have been seen polishing up his master's armour and arms outside Bayard's tent. As whistling lowly to himself, he scrubbed away at the last article, his master's poniard, he was inwardly ruminating: "There! that poniard is clean again at last, a nice job I've had to clean it, the blood of those two ugly French squires stuck to it like wax. 'Tis pity 'twas not their master's though! If the Chevalier had but done as I asked last night, and taken me with him, I could myself have polished off those two women-catchers and so left my Seigneur to spit that kidnapping cur of an Admiral at his leisure. In Savoy, Italy or Hungary, my master left people of that class to me while he went for nobler game. Ah! well, when I win the knightly spurs myself, and with luck that will be after our next fight, I'll ever fly for higher game myself. Not that I'll desert the Seigneur though—rather I'd be his squire than become fifty knights. Hulloo! what goes on over there? archery! and the Frenchmen at it too! the English King I think, and Bourbon taking lessons, let's see how they shoot."

Laying down his dagger, L'Allègre strolled a little way in the direction of the lists, but presently returned with a contemptuous expression on his countenance—he evidently did not think much of the Duc de Bourbon's archery.

Taking up a helmet, to give it an extra polish, the worthy squire resumed his line of thought.

"I know not what's come over Bayard! When that saucy little Anne came round to fetch me in the early dawn, there I found him, rigid as a stone

statue, at the door of the Duchesse d'Alençon's tent. Scarce could I induce him to move; 'tis as if we had gone into the knight-errantry business after all our travels. Well I, for one, care not, if but the English maid-of-honour continue her visits after dark and before daylight. Noble she says she is as I, and, on her mother's side at least, descends from dukes. 'Tis from the bourgeois father, doubtless, she hath such free manners! For one so young she knows a deal, and her lips are ripe as a cherry, I taste their sweetness yet!" Here L'Allègre smacked his lips appreciatively—then his thoughts ran on: "That Anne, sly puss as she is, knows full well the coquettish ways of France, ay, knows of French knavish tricks as well; she bade me look out for trouble for my Seigneur—and that shortly. Better had we done, she said, to offer ourselves to England. Maybe she spoke the truth, yet now is it too late. I wonder if my Chevalier yet sleepeth? I'll place his sword within the tent, and near him, as precaution, perchance the trouble may be near at hand already."

As, after quietly putting Bayard's sword down by his side without awakening him from his tardy slumbers, L'Allègre came forth, his brow was perplexed. "I vow," he thought, "my master sleeps most soundly. Yet strange that he, of all men, dreams of woman—he murmured 'Marguerite!' But what goes on yonder? The King of France disturbs the archery, takes Bourbon's bow. They look this way, call archers to them! This, methinks, bodes mischief. Well, here they come, I'll sit me tight down before the doorway."

A few minutes later, the Constable de Bourbon, followed by some archers of the guard carrying the chains they used for unruly soldiers in the guard-tent, came upon the scene, to find L'Allègre whistling and polishing away with an air of absolute unconcern.

"Holà! fellow, wake up!" exclaimed the Duc de Bourbon. "Whatever your name may be, get out of the way. I would pass."

The squire raised his eyebrows and stared at the Constable in an impertinent manner, before replying: "My name is not fellow but Armand de L'Allègre, son of the right noble Vicomte de L'Allègre in Savoy, and, whoever you be, you cannot pass unless you tell your business. My noble Seigneur sleeps—his night was disturbed somewhat."

"I'll brook no insolence from squires! Sleeping or waking, by the orders of the King of France, I must see the Seigneur de Bayard at once. Will you stand aside?"

Without rising and still polishing his helmet, L'Allègre replied: "Talk not so loud, I beg! how can my master sleep? Would you enter, prithee show me your warrant. A squire must do his duty, as you, a knight yourself, should know."

"My orders are verbal, and these archers my warrant, squire!"

"I take no verbal orders, and acknowledge no such warrant!" answered L'Allègre, now speaking very loudly as he intended to wake the Chevalier. "Will it please you, show me the written instructions of the King of France to awaken the noble Bayard while he sleeps."

Bourbon was now exasperated. "Archers!" he exclaimed, "seize me that pestilent fellow; fling him from that doorway!"

L'Allègre rose slowly, shrugging his shoulders. He seemed as if about to make way, but instead, putting his head within the tent, threw in his master's shield. "Arm yourself!" he cried, and then he flung himself down across the doorway, seizing the tent ropes. "Only by force shall the whole lot of your paltry French archers move a Savoyard squire!" he cried derisively.

As the archers flung themselves roughly upon

L'Allègre, and endeavoured vainly to make him release his hold, Bayard, armed with sword and shield, appeared at the doorway. The archers fell back hurriedly when he told them furiously that unless they released his squire he would split their skulls.

L'Allègre being now free, the Chevalier addressed the Constable. "Monsieur de Bourbon, what means this visit with armed men, and what this insult to my squire, for which you owe me reparation? Defend yourself! What, you will not draw?"

"Pierre de Terrail, Seigneur de Bayard," replied the Constable, in firm but courteous tones, "we have no quarrel, thus I beg you lay aside your weapon. I come in my office as Constable of France, to arrest you by orders of the Very Christian King, to whom falsely have you sworn allegiance."

"Duc de Bourbon, on what false charge would you venture to attach my person? You astound me by this insolence!"

"You are charged as having come hither as the spy of the Emperor Charles V., who, despite his specious representations to King François, is well known to all men as his bitter and treacherous foe."

"Bayard a spy of the Emperor! Are you mad, Constable, or merely malicious? A spy of Charles V., who is your friend rather than mine! And you, of all men, Bourbon, to bring this insult! Have we not fought side by side? Where are your witnesses to this outrageous charge?"

"Chevalier, evidence or witnesses are not for me to provide. Am I the King's attorney? Obeying his instructions, I but name you spy. I beg you, therefore, yield me your sword until the charge be proven or disproven."

L'Allègre, who had been standing by unguarded, now rushed to Bayard's side. He had snatched up a lance, which he held threateningly, with point to wards the Duc and his archers.

"Sir," he exclaimed, "yield not! They are but eight or ten. We can fight them until some of ours come to our assistance. We have faced worse odds ere now."

Bayard's head was, however, long, and in this emergency he remembered how far away were his men-at-arms. The camp-marshal had made, indeed, a point of the Chevalier having his tent pitched in an honourable part of the camp, near to those of other great seigneurs. But for another reason he thought it wiser not to resist, and therefore replied:

"Peace, L'Allègre, and lower that lance's point. We could, indeed, face these followers of the King of France; they are not many. But to the Very Christian King have I plighted my troth, to do so, therefore, would but prove me guilty of the very want of faith of which thus madly am I accused." Turning then to the Constable, he added, "Duc de Bourbon, this deep insult is, I ween, the result of the instigation of the Admiral of France, a low, un-knightly hound from whose foul hands, by God's good grace, I last night tore the Duchesse d'Alençon. Have you not heard of it?"

Bourbon smiled satirically. "Heard of it? ay, but what did you in her tent? and why killed you not the scoundrel? In sooth, he deserved death, if but for his bungling when all the odds were in his favour, and, as I should shrewdly guess, the King behind him in his villainy. Had you but done so, 'tis odds Bayard had not now been branded spy. But more I cannot parley, the King says you are the Emperor's spy, and, since I must accept His Royal Grace's word, a spy to me you are! Yield me, therefore, your sword! I would do my duty without force to one who hath been my comrade in the field."

"Yet would you insult him! You shall answer for your words when I regain my sword, which alas! must I yield, or prove myself indeed disloyal—and therefore, Constable, now take you the hilt

as later shall you feel the point, unless you have it in you to play the gentleman and so to give me back mine honour. Whatever part you play, or vile or noble, the God of justice is on my side!"

"That may be so, yet no challenge I accept unless your name be cleared. Archers! remove that squire to the guard-tent and keep him close. Provost-marshal! those chains! secure this seigneur as a very criminal!"

"My master in chains! I will not stand by and see it!"

In an instant the loyal L'Allègre had once more seized upon his spear, and would have driven it through the body of the provost-marshal had not Bayard struck up the point, while observing: "Restrain your anger, my good squire, although it be well deserved. Nor grieve for me, I pray, my faithful friend, we have One above shall help us—thus for the moment yield as Bayard yields. Yet Duc de Bourbon, thus to treat a loyal man as traitor, I vow, is most unworthy—it is the last indignity."

The Constable waited until, having secured the Chevalier, the archers had retired with L'Allègre, then said: "The last indignity, you think, Bayard? I scarce can tell—there may be worse to follow! Whatever may befall, 'twill be a lesson that when one visits a Princess in her tent at night, one should be prepared to keep out all intruders—moreover, not to spare a rival!"

"Had such fortune fallen to my lot, I had surrounded the tent with men-at-arms. Where were your men-at-arms? As soldier you should have watched against surprises—in love matters you are, it seems, a very baby! Had the lovely Madame d'Alençon honoured me with an assignation, I had not been disturbed—nay, not even though her charming mother came to spoil the party."

The Constable laughed lightly, but his handsome,

sinister features took on a peculiar expression of hatred as he referred to his supposed fiancée, Madame. Pierre de Terrail, who was now seated on the floor with his wrists and ankles in manacles, carefully observed the Constable's face. His blood seethed within him as he heard the free and easy manner in which the long-time lover of the Duchesse d'Angoulême spoke of her daughter, the Princess Marguerite.

Bourbon was within reach of him, he could have easily felled him with his chained hands, and was for a moment minded so to do. Then he restrained himself—such conduct would not be in accordance with his knightly vows—the man evidently trusted him, moreover, to commit no such boorish action. Scathingly, however, Bayard remarked: "Scarce can I believe that you have Royal blood in your veins! A very villain are you thus to asperse the honour of one whom your lips are not fit to mention!"

"My fair cousin, Marguerite, in whose tent at least two seigneurs are known to have been last night at hours which were, to say the least of it, unusual! And since, although Bonnivet, as hath been reported to me, first caused the sentinel on her door to be forcibly removed, whereas he had, 'tis evident, allowed you to enter unchallenged, my said fair cousin hath but herself to thank, should I now say to you in private that which doubtless others say aloud: that she seems scarcely careful as she should be of her honour."

The Chevalier was commencing to reply furiously, when Bourbon interrupted. "Nay, rage not, Bayard, nor deem me all your enemy. If, in good sooth, I be so somewhat, 'tis as rival, but this between ourselves alone. Moreover, I bear you bitter grudge in that you left that scoundrel Bonnivet alive. Yet may you, more than I, have cause to rue your ill-timed mercy; therefore of him no more I'll mention now, save but to say that, by a trick unworthy,

acting in your name, he hath an hour since sent orders to your men-at-arms. They are now marching to another camp. Of Fleurange, likewise, save but some sixty lances, the troops this morn have marched to Dieppe. Thus, with the King for friend, he holds you at his vengeance—for none can rescue you, who lie here branded as a spy."

"I seek not rescue but justice, Bourbon, yet this you tell is but what to expect of Bonnivet—the godless wretch who, calling other men to aid, would bind a virtuous woman—offer her violence—oh! 'tis most monstrous! I had done well to kill him!"

"Yet did not! therefore may hear more of him ere long. Now, I leave you; no longer must I stay talking with a spy. A spy of the Emperor Charles, forsooth! 'tis well designed."

Bourbon threw back his head and laughed in an ill-natured manner, for his jealousy where Marguerite was concerned had indeed made him vicious who otherwise would have been Bayard's friend.

The repetition of the word spy, however, stung Bayard to the quick, and caused him to say that he had meant to keep unsaid within his breast. It was in his calmest tones that he commanded: "Charles de Montpensier-Bourbon, be seated a moment ere you go, for I have that to say that you, who call me spy, must hear! Yet, would you save your treacherous head—which I hold at my mercy—send further back yon page who stands without."

Bourbon was frightened—what did this man know? He, however, answered lightly: "'Tis merely my good page, Louis de Pompéran, whom I am, but to show I bear you no ill-will, about to leave to attend to your wants as you have lost the services of your squire." Going to the door, he called: "Retire, Louis, the distance of a bow-shot, and there remain."

Returning, the Constable took the proffered seat by Bayard's side, and listened in silence while,

slowly, the Chevalier unravelled to his astonished ears the history of a long course of secret negotiations which he had himself been holding with the Emperor and with the Archduchess Marguerite, the aunt of Charles V., the same that had as a child been married to Charles VIII. of France, but disgraced and sent back to her father Maximilian's Court when a better match was found.

The Constable was a bold man, one of the boldest that ever lived, and capable likewise. Yet his swarthy cheek blanched as he saw all that Bayard knew. He endeavoured to brazen the matter out, however, by asserting that, since no war had been declared between France and the Empire, no harm had been done ; affirming also that his long course of duplicity had but been to try the Emperor and to see if he and his aunt, the Governess of the Netherlands, were as loyal in their friendship to King François as they would make out. He endeavoured at last to turn the tables by feebly declaring that Bayard must be the spy he was said to be, or how could he have known that which he knew—and he went on talking in this strain. Bayard, his flashing eyes fixed upon the Constable, remained watching him as though he were reading his every thought, until, at last, Bourbon disconcerted, stammered and then stopped speaking in the middle of a sentence.

Bayard smiled bitterly. "You continue to call me spy, and I could cause your head to fall, Bourbon ! but I prefer to meet you man to man. Spy against spy, eh ! Constable Charles de Montpensier ? "

"Why have you not made this known already ? " ejaculated Bourbon at length, crestfallen.

"Because I wished to spare an old comrade from disgrace ; moreover, had it in my power to prevent you wreaking the ill to the King of France that you intended, without causing your head to fall, when the proper moment should have arrived."

Bourbon sprang to his feet, extending his hand. "Bayard, you are noble as ever! forgive me my words! I will not fight you even if you be set at liberty. I cannot fight you, my arms would fail me against such a man!"

"But you shall fight me!" Bayard retorted, while refusing his hand; and then there was silence.

As the two men sat looking at one another, voices were heard in the distance. One of them sounded like that of King François.

"Leave my tent before you become compromised," remarked the Chevalier grimly.

Bourbon rose to leave. Turning at the door, he remarked: "Bayard, I myself will save you. You know my power!"

"I refuse all help from a spy of the Emperor!" returned the Chevalier proudly, and coldly he turned his face away from the Constable.

CHAPTER XIV

CHARLES DE BOURBON AND BAYARD

AS the Duc de Bourbon walked away from the tent where he had left Pierre de Terrail in chains, while his own page Louis de Pompéran sat idly without, he saw three litters near the lists. They had been passing near Bayard's tent when the French King's voice had been heard, and now François, his Chancellor, Cardinal Du Prat and Bonnivet having just alighted, were standing talking together while apparently watching the archery in which King Henry could be seen engaged at a distance.

Bourbon took in at once what was intended by this public appearance of the King of France with his favourite, whose arm he had familiarly taken.

"He has made it up with his sister," he thought, "and would have all the world know that such is the case, and that the Admiral and he are still as one!" An expression of hatred swept across his features and for a moment he thought that he would not go near the King. The Duc changed his mind, however, and therefore, walking up to the group by the gilded railings, saluted François ceremoniously and the Chancellor politely, but absolutely ignored the Admiral.

"Your instructions have been carried out, Sire," he remarked, "and the Seigneur de Bayard is in chains. I herewith surrender to you his sword. Having done my duty as Constable of France in

placing this gentleman under arrest in his tent, further matters regarding his treatment will doubtless lie in the hands of His Eminence the Chancellor? Shall I deliver the Chevalier's sword to him?"

"An it so please you, fair cousin," replied François laconically. He did not like the look on the Constable's face nor quite understand his attitude as, having given the sword to Du Prat, the Duc saluted again and strolled proudly away.

As, without a word until he was out of earshot, the three watched Bourbon's retiring form, could they have read his thoughts they would have been found to run as follows:

"With Bayard I am safe!—he is a wonderful man—would that he would throw in his lot with me! And yet, although he will not and I cannot ask him, he is wrong to accuse me of treachery to my weak, shifty cousin yonder. Nay 'tis not treachery but policy, and, could Bayard but see it, my policy would be far the better for this land of France, of which seven great provinces are mine, and to which I was sole heir until the late arrival of a puling infant to Queen Claude, my sickly cousin. My curses on that child as on its father!"

Halting at a distance from all on or near the lists, the Duc de Bourbon placed himself upon a long seat of silver which stood among some artificial bushes of gold. While idly knocking off the heads of a profusion of tall daisies, with a sheathed sword which he had unbuckled for the purpose, he continued his cogitations.

"What is it that men call treachery? The merest accident of birth, and I had been where François stands to-day! Let but an arrow now fly a trifle wide of those targets, an attack of croup remove that sickly Dauphin, and I am King of France! And how more fitted I to rule than he: vainglorious boaster, adulterer, drunkard, companion of a Bonnivet!

What is his policy? merely from foolish jealousy to flout the Emperor! forsooth! 'twill be but to humble France! And should I marry now Louise, his shrill-tongued amorous mother, I make of him my son-in-law! Nay, no such sons-in-law for Charles de Bourbon! Rather will he rule the State himself, ay, rule it with a policy worth talking of, as friend of Charles the Emperor. Together will we drive the conquering Turk from Europe. His armies shall be under my command who know how to lead them, while one of his sisters will I take to wife. We'll snap our fingers at yon English bull frog, whom we now play with, put his vain Cardinal in his proper place, some country abbey! Then, when Pope Leo dies, as soon he must, of too much food and too much wine, we'll make our own Pontiff. I have him in my pocket now! Then having Europe at our feet and having crushed Constantinople flat, young Charles and I will pass the seas; take Tunis, Algiers, Jerusalem, regain the Holy Sepulchre! That's what a Bourbon calls a policy! the policy of a man! 'Tis scarce that of the Very Christian King, who drifts with every wind this way and that, while shedding bags of gold in foolish fees to foreign Cardinals, who mock him in their sleeve."

With brows as black as night, the Constable was continuing to chop off the heads of all the tall marguerites within reach, while thus planning out his great ambitions, when he was surprised by a feminine voice, one that he knew too well, but hated, behind him.

"Why, my fair cousin of Bourbon, what hath poor Marguerite done to you, that thus ruthlessly you destroy her namesakes? Now must you beg her pardon!"

He turned to perceive Madame Louise with the Duchesse d'Alençon. Other ladies were at a little distance behind them, while Anne Boleyn was

disappearing in the bushes, wandering off alone to where the archery was taking place.

Bourbon rose and greeted his kinswomen courteously, when the conversation became banale, all reference to the affair of the previous night being at first studiously avoided. Being in an ill-humour, the Constable had nearly made a sarcastic reply, with reference to Marguerite having recently been in greater danger than her namesakes the daisies, but a glance at her pale features made him change his mind. He, full of the fiery Italian blood, ever burned with a fierce passion for the Princess, and now felt pity for her, while hating Bonnivet more than ever that thus he had caused her cheeks to blanche.

Very soon the conversation turned to the burning subject of the day, for it was impossible to keep away from it, and, while the Princess remained mostly silent, the voluble Madame had much to say and very decided views to express. From the Duchesse d'Angoulême, Bourbon therefore soon learned the same version of the story as that told by Anne Boleyn to Cardinal Wolsey, while no words were bad enough for her in which to express her hatred and detestation of the Admiral or her scorn of the behaviour of the Comtesse, whom Marguerite thought it, however, wiser not at that moment to defend. Madame always abused Françoise, who was, for that matter, strong enough to defend herself when necessary, but, from Madame's endless flow of speech, the Duc de Bourbon now for the first time learned that it had been at the request of the Comtesse that the Seigneur de Bayard had been summoned to Marguerite's tent. While listening, the Constable made no comment, but his recent jealousy of the Chevalier disappeared.

Indeed, when both mother and daughter united in singing the praises of Pierre de Terrail, and

Bourbon understood from how imminent a danger he had rescued the Princess, he felt almost a guilty feeling, for that he had recently obeyed the King's command in putting Bayard not only under arrest, but in chains. He inwardly determined that only to save himself from open dishonour would he ever be persuaded to bear arms against that noble gentleman, to whose present forbearance he himself owed so much. Then, after debating in his mind whether he should do so or no, he imparted to his cousins the news of how he had just, by the King's urgent order, been compelled to treat the Chevalier. Upon hearing these tidings, while Marguerite became a shade paler, Madame Louise turned red in the face, and screamed aloud with indignation at the insult put by her son upon the Duke of Savoy in the person of the Seigneur de Bayard. She was for instantly rushing off to make a scene with the King. From this she was, however, dissuaded by her beloved Bourbon, who informed Louise de Savoie that François was at that very moment with the Admiral, who, he surmised, was probably devising some further mischief. The Constable advised that it would therefore be as well to see how far he would persuade the King to go, before, when he was alone, Madame should take her opportunity of counteracting his evil designs.

Marguerite, who also had it in her mind to endeavour to work against Bonnivet through Françoise, applauded the Constable's advice and, in recompense, smiled upon him gratefully, while praising him for his discerning brain.

Charles de Montpensier was so little accustomed to a word of approbation upon any subject from Marguerite, that he became quite humanised, all his ill-humour leaving him. On the spot he determined that, when the time should come for him to carry out his vast plans, whereby he should become the master of the destinies of France, he would not, after all,

marry one of the Emperor's sisters. On the contrary, he would pick a quarrel with d'Alençon, kill him and make of Marguerite his Queen. As it passed through his mind, however, that he would never be able to induce that craven Prince, d'Alençon, to fight, he compounded matters in his brain by the thought that he could easily find one or two Italian *bravi* to come to France and do the trick for him. This, after all, would, for many reasons, be by far the more satisfactory plan.

So delighted was the Duc with the prospect which he was planning out that he became most amiable with the Queen-Mother, who vowed that never for years past had she known her "fiancé" to be so charming. Even the Princess, for once, found her cousin quite bright and entertaining, and, as they remained seated and chatting together, she began to think that Bourbon had really some good points which hitherto she had failed to recognise.

Meanwhile, no sooner had the Constable's back been turned, than the King continued the conversation which his appearance had interrupted.

"And so you believe, Cardinal, that our good Bonnivet is, as usual, right, and the Chevalier de Bayard, nothing but the Emperor's spy—yet must we have a reason."

"Sire," replied the Chancellor Du Prat, "I could give you half-a-dozen, the first that His Eminence of York urged upon His Grace of England to secure his services. I understand, although I speak it not, the English tongue, and heard him—what more, Sire, do you require?"

François laughed disagreeably. "You Churchmen are ever over ready to suspect one another, but for our part we have found the English Chancellor the Prince of good fellows. So that you be not by to check his mirth, Wolsey can tell a story with the best of us. Nor will he flinch from the wine cup—would that you had but half his courage there!—he

can drink like——” the King hesitated for a simile, “drink like Bonnivet, and never turn a hair!”

“Also like Bonnivet, Sire? and you say that after last night!”

“Oh! leave last night alone, Cardinal—we all are sick of it,” replied the King pettishly, “’tis time to talk of to-day, to-morrow, yesterday, the day before, of any day that was not such a bungle; the day that Bayard came will do, to start with. Since you so well remember its happenings, can you not call to mind the fact that Bayard then denounced His Eminence of York to us most roundly?”

“All trickery, Sire, all trickery! he but was throwing sand in our eyes, the better to cover up his tracks. And why think you His Grace of England praised him so? told stories to his honour of things that happened at the Emperor Maximilian’s Court—the grandfather, Sire, of Charles V.!”

“Ay—we had forgotten that! they seemed to like him there!”

“And Sire,” continued Du Prat, following up his advantage, “call you not to mind the sequel? This knight of Savoy was sent thence whither—to what place of all others? To Brussels and to Malines, to pay a visit to the Archduchess Marguerite of Austria—with her, forsooth! to study architecture! How often since then hath he not perchance seen this Princess, who once was almost Queen of France, since hath been Princess of the Asturias, then was a Duchess of Savoy, and, through it all, is France’s greatest enemy. ’Twas she who late in the election for the Empire, bought all the Electoral Princes—caused your overthrow, ay, by foulest bribery, secured the victory of Charles V. If she be then the friend of Bayard, what can he be but spy—a spy most damnable and dangerous? And had he not seen her lately, how, Sire, had he known the history of those harmless treaties, for such they doubtless are or he had said naught of them, which

he, but to hoodwink us the better, feigned to divulge?"

"Ay, ay, Chancellor, you are right, I doubt you no longer," replied François. He was livid with rage at the recollection of his recent defeat in the election for the Empire, by which he had become foolish in the eyes of Europe—the more so because he himself had poured out gold like water to the seven Electoral Princes, who had taken his money but to snap their fingers in his face and vote for his opponent.

When the Very Christian King called that election to mind, if all Europe had had but one head, and at one blow he could have cut it off, he would have dealt the blow. Nothing now cared he for proofs, the vaguest suspicion was enough for him.

"A villainous traitor, indeed!" he added after a pause in which he had seen red. "Bayard shall die! But how shall he die? Bonnivet, you more than all have cause to hate him! for you then 'tis to name the penalty."

A smile spread over the dissolute face of the Admiral, all disfigured as it was by the blows that Bayard's fist had dealt him overnight.

"I say, Sire, that we should do well to hang this spy with the silken rope with which last night he had the insolence to bind and almost hang me, when but playing an innocent little practical joke."

François laughed outright. "What! would you treat him to a new version of the rope trick? Well then, good Bonnivet, should he be greatly honoured, as you yourself likewise last night, at being noosed with that same silken cord with which you made garters for my fair sister. And yet why not the axe? to hang him is somewhat severe, the whole of Christendom will cry out for that we hanged a Bayard."

"Nay, the axe is too good for him, Sire, a spy of the Emperor should die with the noble collar of the Golden Fleece around his neck."

"The jest is good! yet will we borrow it, and tell our Brother England that 'tis the order of the Garter! Yet what saith our Chancellor? Shall we hang this knight, Du Prat?"

"Ay, Sire, I am with Bonnivet, give him the rope! Of silk or hemp it matters little, yet thus shall you likewise strangle Wolsey, with whom, I vow, he is in league to sell us all to Austria."

François hesitated a moment before giving the final word, for, personally, he was of opinion that a knight should only be beheaded. Bonnivet, however, endeavoured to persuade the King.

"Sire," he said, "you must hang him! I hate the fellow, and you love me, is not that sufficient reason?"

"Ay, my dear friend, reason enough! Bayard shall be hanged!" replied the Very Christian King.

CHAPTER XV

ANNE'S ANCLE

ANNE BOLEYN, saucy maid that she was, had not strolled off alone through the bushes without an object in view. It is possible that that object may have had something to do with words that had passed between Cardinal Wolsey and herself in the early morning, and that she may have wished for another moment or two alone with His Eminence of York.

Whatever her reasons, as François, after having sent away Du Prat with instructions to erect a gallows near Bayard's tent, was wandering with Bonnivet in search of feminine amusement, he suddenly met with his sister's plump young maid-of-honour.

Anne had been running, her cheeks were flushed, and she had lost one shoe. As King François came upon her, she had thrown herself down on the grass behind a bush and was holding up her shoeless foot in her hand. Her eyes were particularly bright, her locks all dishevelled, and the young girl's appearance, while attractive, had in it something of abandon.

"What is that impudent baggage of my sister's up to now?" remarked the Very Christian King, "she's not bad looking, eh! Bonnivet?"

Going up to Anne, he accosted her familiarly.

"Holà! Mademoiselle Anne, wherefore squat you here, like a dead rabbit, with one leg up in the

air, and why puff thus like a little grampus? Is it to the Admiral or myself that you would thus display so much angle? Why not elevate the other, and then we can admire one apiece, now we have learned that you possess such charming womanly attributes, for which hitherto we had, by Saint Michael! imagined you somewhat young!"

Anne assumed an appearance of confusion as, while still panting, she replied laughingly.

"Oh, Sire, 'twas my Liege Lord, the King of England, he is terrible! He pursued me, Sire, ay, pursued me before all the knights on the lists. And, Sire," added Anne, coyly, "he caught me and, actually, sought to infringe the liberty of the subject!"

François laughed: "Well, what did you, little rabbit? and wherefore have you run thus to ground?"

"Oh! Sire! how could I subject myself to such improprieties in a Monarch?—and before all those seigneurs too!"

"Ay, the audience makes a difference on such occasions; and so that is why the game ran away, eh? And are the hounds in full pursuit, and is that why the quarry hides here? Were it not that we poach not on our Brother England's preserves, we might perchance be inclined to do a little hunting ourselves."

"Sire!" answered the young maid in reproachful tones, and with a great assumption of modesty, "see you not that I have twisted my foot, and lost my shoe and diamond buckle to boot? And I have so few buckles!"

"Well, maybe, if you stop here, you may get another, for we think we see the form of His Grace of England approaching. Come, Bonnivet, my boy, 'tis time for us to move on!"

"Nay, Sire," replied Anne in frightened tones. "Pray go not! I crave your Royal protection, I beg Your Grace stay!"

"Not we, Mademoiselle Anne," replied François,

albeit somewhat regretfully, as he had for the first time realised how really attractive was his sister's maid-of-honour. "We interfere not," he continued good-naturedly, "in the field sports of Merry England, of which, judging from a shoe which our Brother Henry appears to have in his hand, hunt-the-slipper seems to be one! Moreover, since His Eminence of York arrives likewise to take a hand, in case of difficulties, we recommend you to appeal from the State to the Church. Trust to the Cardinal to see that the game is played fair—he understands all games. Now is not that good advice, Bonnivet?" and the King turned to go.

Bonnivet was, however, in no mood for jesting where Anne Boleyn was concerned—he had far too acute a recollection of the manner in which she had all but strangled him on the previous night. He had done nothing but silently scowl at her ever since his arrival with the King. Had it not been for the fact that he stood this day somewhat in awe of Anne's mistress, the Princess, with whom the King had had an affectionate meeting, he would certainly have said something to Anne's disadvantage. For the present he thought it wise to bide his time, and accordingly merely gave the maiden an extra malignant glance as he strolled away with François.

Anne had naturally noted his ill looks, but she did not mind them, for she realised that with the protection of Marguerite she was likely to be henceforth safe from Bonnivet, whatever he might wish to do. She had, moreover, noticed the sudden interest in herself which had developed in the eye of King François, while looking at her. Although somewhat flattered, she determined, however, to keep well out of his way in future, as she was very friendly with the Comtesse, and wisely wished to avoid doing anything to arouse the antagonism of that powerful lady.

Anne Boleyn had not much time left her wherein to think, as, a few seconds after she had been left alone, King Henry arrived on the scene, accompanied by Cardinal Wolsey, while several knights and courtiers followed the young and handsome English King at a respectful distance.

"Well, Sly Puss!" exclaimed Henry jovially, "now that it seems that we have caught you, you must give us that dainty foot and, like Cinderella, allow yourself to be shod—yet, by Saint George! we vow is the foot far too small for the shoe." Seating himself by Anne's side, the King laid unceremonious hold of her ancle.

"Oh! Sire! I really could not allow it," she exclaimed, blushing. "I—I have a hole in my stocking, Sire! moreover, see you not how sorely my ancle is twisted? 'tis dreadful to have to run without shoes. Yet are you alone to blame, Sire, should I now be lamed for life!"

"Let us examine this grave injury," exclaimed Henry, bending forward to look closely. As the courtiers laughed, Anne protested again: "You must not examine my ancle like that, Sire, but take my word for it—'tis not proper, Sire, and besides—"

"Besides what? pretty poppet?"

"Besides His Eminence is looking! I beg Your Grace spare my innocent blushes," and Anne giggled while both Henry and the Cardinal joined in her merriment.

From the way in which His Eminence now leant forward and whispered to his master—whom he governed—it would, could the courtiers have but known what he said, have been evident that the whole of this business with Anne Boleyn was but the repetition of a rehearsed effect.

His words were, "Keep it up, Sire! go on with the ancle play, our little plan works excellently—the French gentlemen think it naught but merry fooling." Then, to Anne, Wolsey added, "My child,

did you manage to find out what they are going to do to Bayard ? ”

Anne snatched her foot away from the King, and, as if indignant, rose to her feet, then she partly fell, with an exclamation of pain, but allowed Henry to catch her. As this by-play was taking place, she said rapidly : “ A page of the King’s overheard, and he told me. Bayard is in chains ; they will hang him to-morrow. Oh ! ’tis terrible ! terrible ! ” The face of the young schemer was, however, all smiles as, with much bluster and laughter, the King of England seated her once more on the grass, and began again to pretend to place her shoe on her little foot.

The Cardinal, keeping up the jest, turned to those standing by, remarking, with a discreet and comical air which was none the less a command : “ Gentlemen ! His Grace the King is pleased to play the shoemaker. There are certain measures, however, which he can only take under the sanctifying eye of Holy Mother Church. I beg you therefore not to appear to watch His Grace too closely while thus amusing himself. See you not those admirable cloud effects yonder in the direction of Calais ? I pray you, gentlemen, note them carefully ! ”

While, as one man, all turned to look for cloud effects where naught was to be seen but a brilliant sun, the Cardinal turned once more to his master.

“ Hang Bayard ! you hear, Sire ! ’Tis admirable ! then will he be surely our man. Continue the foot play and I will aid also, for our time is short, I see Madame de Savoie approaching ! ” Bending over he whispered to Anne and the King together, and, while whispering, contrived to hand a seal to the maid-of-honour.

“ I understand,” Anne whispered in return. “ I am to contrive to give the message and the seal to the Chevalier—the latter as a pledge. It shall be done, Your Eminence.”

Henry interposed with *empressement*. "And accept this signet ring for yourself, little poppet—regard it as an engagement ring!"

"A bit large!" laughed Anne saucily. "I trust, Sire, the engagements may not be as loose as the ring!"

"Wear it on your thumb, little sweetheart," replied Henry while warmly squeezing Anne's hand—"thus will there be no fear of any accidental slip."

"Such as that of my slipper, for instance! Oh, Sire, I fear you men are all alike—deceivers to us poor girls! But I look to His Eminence for protection! And now particularly would I ask for his gracious support, since I see Madame d'Alençon approaching, with Madame and His Highness the Constable."

"And you shall have it, Anne—now and ever!" replied Cardinal Wolsey. "Yet be but faithful, child! Fall back a little way, Sire," he added to King Henry.

So saying, His Eminence busied himself with Anne Boleyn, helping her to rise and supporting her most tenderly.

"'Tis but a little twist, my child, soon will you be rid of all evil effects, I am convinced; bathe you but the foot with warm water!—Yet doubtless it is now most painful!"

Thus was the Cardinal of York heard to remark, in his most unctuous and fatherly tones, as the Princesses and the Duc de Bourbon came up, to see what had befallen Anne Boleyn.

Marguerite was most concerned upon learning of the mischance which had happened to her favourite, to account for which King Henry boldly took his share of blame, saying that he had, for sheer sport, chased his young subject from the lists, when she had fallen. While Madame was gently chiding His Grace of England for taking too much notice of the young girl whom his sister Mary Tudor had

originally brought to France, the Duchesse d'Alençon, who was anxious to be alone with her favourite, offered her her arm to escort her back to her tent. Thereupon, for the sake of being a little longer with his cousin, and also in order to get away from Madame, the Constable also offered to assist Anne, who thus unusually escorted was conducted to Madame d'Alençon's marquee.

"Well, Anne, what is it all about?—tell me the truth!" enquired Marguerite anxiously, as soon as the Duc de Bourbon had been courteously dismissed. "I know that you have something to tell me," she added, "and surmise somehow that it is about the poor Chevalier de Bayard, of whom I have the most dreadful news to impart."

"Dear Madame, I know what you would tell me," Anne replied, "yet be not discouraged, I pray, concerning him, for I have been shown a means for his escape, and, if you will but agree thereto, I will perform my share this night. Yet must we, should he accept the proffered relief, lose his services for your country, France, in order that he may give them to my country, England."

"Oh! what care I, so that this noble seigneur be but spared the horrible thing that hath been designed for him by this wicked Admiral?"—answered Marguerite vehemently. "Moreover," she added, "are not France and England in fact now one? Have we not grown closer together day by day since this happy meeting first began? Let me hear it all, and rest assured, child, not from me shall come any opposition to aught that you may have to do to save him. Yet will I do all that can be done myself also; for Anne, dear little Anne! should they slay him now my heart will most assuredly break!"

Burying her face in her hands, Marguerite sobbed her heart out, while her faithful maid-of-honour, throwing her arms around her mistress, endeavoured

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to comfort her. At length the Princess became somewhat more composed, and then for long the women held converse together, in tones scarcely above a whisper.

Meanwhile, needless to say, no measures were taken for the alleviation of Anne's twisted ankle. Nor were they necessary, for no sooner had the Duc de Bourbon turned his back to the door of Marguerite's tent than Anne walked as soundly as any person living !

CHAPTER XVI

IN CHAINS

IN his heart King François knew perfectly well that he was doing absolutely wrong in the matter of Bayard, and he knew further that every one, save Bonnivet, his sycophantic followers and the Chancellor Du Prat, who played into Bonnivet's hands, would say that he was wrong.

Like many a weak man under similar circumstances, this knowledge only the more determined François to persist in his wrong-doing. With the revengeful Admiral constantly at his elbow to urge him, he resolved therefore to carry out the execution of the knight of Savoy with so little delay that none should have the time so to work upon his feelings as to cause his better self to assert the supremacy. For, weak as he might be, François was not wholly bad and was given to generous impulses at times, seldom as those generous impulses had been allowed to show themselves since he had made of the Admiral his bosom friend.

Now he had, without any proof, without any trial or even any public accusation, made up his mind, or what he considered his mind, which was really Bonnivet's mind, to put Pierre de Terrail to death, on the mere suspicion of being the spy of an as yet friendly Power. He had determined moreover to subject this noble knight to a shameful death by hanging. It was monstrous! but, having said he would do it, the foolish young Monarch resolved

that the execution should be carried out on the following morning.

No opposition, he knew, could come from Fleurance, who had left personally to superintend the installation of the greater part of his Swiss troops as a garrison at Dieppe. Long therefore before that Border Prince could hear what was in the wind, Bayard would be dead. Should there be delay, news might reach him and he might return with his men—such an eventuality as this must be avoided.

To Bayard's own men-at-arms a further message was sent, removing them to a greater distance. The message was sent by Bonnivet in their leader's name—but at the same time, to prevent any chance of their returning too soon, as well as to give plausibility to this military movement, a large body of French troops were sent off with them by the King. The commander of these troops was given orders to encamp his forces across the road lying between the followers of the knight of Savoy and the encampment at the Field of the Cloth of Gold.

Although he was unaware of his danger, as he was purposely kept in the dark as to his impending fate, the unfortunate Chevalier was thus cut off from any hope of rescue from those who had come with him to offer their services to France, that country to which he belonged by birth, for which he had often fought in the past, and to whose King he had so recently sworn allegiance.

Lying in his tent all day long in chains, with a mind conscious of right, his feelings were naturally bitter at the indignity to which he had been subjected. Putting his trust in God, however, in accordance with his constant custom, Bayard did not feel downhearted. He believed firmly that the right would come up top, a mistake be put right and he himself be set at liberty, to wage the combat upon which he had firmly determined with the Duc de Bourbon. Meanwhile he awaited philosophically

to see what might transpire. He had been in chains before that day! With Louis de Pompéran, the young page of that great noble, he attempted no converse. He pitied the lad for having as master one whom he knew to be a traitor, and merely hoped that the youth might not be led astray by an unscrupulous liege lord who had no thought of virtue. He did not, however, think it necessary to speak to one who was probably left with him merely as a spy. Save the page, who sat without, while shifting his position from time to time to get the benefit of the shade of the tent, none came near the Chevalier. The long hours wore wearily away and he heard the sounds of the camp but had no other companion than his thoughts. Among these varied sounds, towards nightfall, he could distinguish, at some little distance to the rear of his tent, the sound of men digging and hammering and eventually, as a breeze sprung up, could hear the swinging of chains. Bayard, who had seen many a gallows, concluded that one had been set up, and that probably some unfortunate malefactor who had been hanged elsewhere was, according to an usual custom, about to be gibbeted upon it, as an example to evil-doers. From the loose way in which the chains rattled, he knew that the gallows must as yet be devoid of its gruesome burden. Beyond, however, a prayer for the soul of the unknown malefactor, the Chevalier's only thought of the matter was that it was a strange thing to deface the glories of this wonderful camp of gold and silver by such an unsightly object as a gibbet.

At last night fell and Pierre de Terrail, who had partaken of scarcely any refreshment throughout the day, and was moreover galled by his chains, became athirst.

He called therefore aloud for the page, whom he had heard moving without not very long before, to bring him some water. Getting no answer, the

Chevalier concluded that the boy must have fallen asleep, being overcome by the heat. Although his thirst increased, rather than awake the lad, for a considerable time he kept silence. At last, however, fancying that he heard young Louis moving outside, the knight cried out again.

"Some water, I pray of you, Monsieur de Pompéran!"

The steps that he had heard receded, but a minute later, the flap of the door of his tent being thrown back, Bayard perceived against the background of the sky a slender form entering—then a low voice was heard murmuring:

"I heard you call for water, Sir. I have brought it for you fresh from the spring—will you drink?"

The chained man felt an arm gently placed around his neck and the cup held to his lips. He swallowed down part of the water, thirstily, then observed: "Ah! that is indeed refreshing, and you are a kindly youth." Then as he perceived by the softness of the form supporting him that it was not that of a boy, he continued. "But this is no page's hand! it bears too many rings—'tis moreover no page's body against which my head is pillowed! You surely are a woman! Who are you, that are so kind to a prisoner?"

"A woman indeed, Sir, a young one, but most sympathetic. Alas! alas! that they should think to hang so noble a knight!"

Bayard started. "Hang me! For me then is yon gallows upon which the chain rattles so dismally? You are mistaken, maiden, whoever you be. Even should I, all unjustly, be doomed to die who am without offence—yet is a knight's death more honourable—the axe is his guerdon in such cases."

"Alas! Sir, no. The King of France, counselled by the Admiral de Bonnivet is most bitter against you. He vows that he will spare you no indignity, and that you must hang to-morrow."

"God's will be done! Maiden, prithee, of your courtesy, give me the rest of the water. Ah! how delicious is the draught! 'tis almost sufficient to make one forget these ill tidings. It comes to my fancy, maiden, that other innocent men may haply have had no such ambrosial nectar wherewith to wash down the news of their misfortunes and therefore do I consider myself most lucky." Bayard gave a little cheerful laugh, then added. "Most truly grateful am I to the kindly cupbearer. Yet will she place her hand within my chained hands, I would devine who is my friendly Ganymede, as the blind do, feelingly, 'twill serve as a simple game to banish angry thoughts."

"Heavens! how courageous is this nobleman about to die!" thought the unknown, as she placed her tiny hand within the powerful grip of the Chevalier, who held it gently, then raised to his lips. While barely touching it, he kept her hand thus raised for a few moments, then said, wondering. "I never yet have touched these little friendly fingers which almost are those of a child, yet would I almost swear that late have they themselves touched one great and beautiful, a Princess so gracious than none other is there like her in this land, I need not name her! Maiden, speak I not aright? Was I not myself not long since near that same gracious lady?"

"Oh Sir, how marvellous! how did you know? how pleased she will be to know that you remember her so well as to recognise on me her very perfume! For in no other fashion could you by any chance have known from whom I came. Then, Sir, know you likewise who I am, I ween."

"Nay, little maid, I said not that I knew from whom you came, yet at yourself I now can almost guess, yet was this hand somewhat small to last night nearly choke the villainous Admiral."

"Oh, Sir, how clever you are! I am Anne Boleyn,

indeed. But Sir, it was the Princess Marguerite who sent me to you, and with her loving greetings. She bade me say she offers up her prayers to Heaven for your safety."

"To me! the gracious Princess sends me her loving greetings?"

"Ay Sir, why not? did you not last night save her from worse than death, and are you not, alas! now like to die for what you did for her? For such a reason a true woman loves a man—loved she not him before! at such a time a true woman shews her true self to the one true noble gentleman to whom she owes everything, her honour, perhaps life as well."

"But slight was the service, maiden, yet most highly do I value the prayers of that most gracious lady. So she were saved, my life is nothing!"

"Sir, would you please her, you will save that life, should the means be offered to you."

"Fair child, I am in chains! my friends all have been sent away! what means of escape are possible? Yet so that she whom you speak of deem me true, and credit no base report to my dishonour, death will not be so hard to look in the face, yet this may you tell her, I had hoped to die—as a true knight should—in defence of the right for some noble cause, not on the gallows as a common thief. Oh! rather, maiden, had it been a cross!"

The Chevalier paused and sighed deeply, while Anne was so affected that she felt something rising in her throat to choke her. Mastering herself, however, she resumed eagerly: "Sir, I bring the means, will you but avail yourself of them. Take this seal I place in your hand, 'tis the pledge of the sincerity of those on whose behalf I have now come to you."

"I can feel the seal, my child, 'tis large and heavy, from whom did you receive it? 'Tis almost as a seal of State."

"Sir, it was His Eminence the Cardinal of York who gave it to me in the presence of His Grace of England. From them I come to you. And this they bade me say: that rather than see one so noble die a vile felon's death, England is proud to offer the hospitality which France, or rather France's King, refuses. Themselves will welcome you at Guines, and all is easy. From you I go to warn the *Sieur de Fontenach*, who waits with fifty troopers that yet remain in camp of *Fleurange's* Swiss men-at-arms. They will be here at once and carry you off to safety. The bloodless rescue of your good squire *L'Allègre* is arranged for likewise."

"I thank England for the proffered hospitality. And you yourself, methinks, are likewise English, though by upbringing French. Yet, maiden, know you not that Kings and Cardinals do not such deeds for naught? What would His Grace and His Eminence in return, should I accept this seal—and safety with it?"

"Your oath of allegiance to King Henry, Sir, is all that is required. And thus I beg you quickly say that you agree, for in his Court will you be quit of danger, free of these vile chains which now disgrace your wrists beneath my fingers. I shudder to touch them, as would all who love you, Sir—and those who send you loving messages! Delay not, I implore! the men-at-arms are ready—waiting—yet at a little distance; and I must go to *Fontenach*, a gentleman whom well you know and bade me say that, if needs be, he would die for you—ay, he and all his men! Yet is he in no danger, for no sooner hath he left you at *Guines* than he will ride to his chief, your friend, at *Dieppe*. Oh! send me, Sir, send me!"

In her anxiety to force the Chevalier to consent, Anne with her little hand grasped the manacled hands of *Bayard* and shook them so that the chains connecting them clanked aloud. He, however, merely answered, in calm, thoughtful tones.

"My child, take back your seal! For see you not that this is a wrongful mission upon which you have been sent? yet have you my heartfelt thanks for that thus you came to one about to die, but this must be my answer: Bayard, who hath sworn to serve the Very Christian King, may die the felon's death, yet takes he not back his oath, gives no allegiance to another Prince. Though spy he be now falsely branded, too high he sets the honour of his name, which dying he would leave untarnished. Maiden, there is no more to be said, and now should you retire lest yourself may run some danger here."

"Nay, I run no risks, for Louis, who was my playmate, watches, but you, Sir, alas! are doomed indeed. Oh! think but a moment longer! My mistress knows all, she sent me on my mission, herself hath seen Fontenach, herself hath changed the guard that was watching L'Allègre your squire, who is in friendly hands. Think then of her grief! Why should you die who may live, perchance to do her further service? Rather, she bade me tell you, ay, rather a thousand times, would she have you lost for France than thus be lost for ever."

A sob was now in Anne Boleyn's voice, and tears of pity and vexation running down her cheeks. Why was this knight's virtuous obstinacy so great to die? Why could she not move him? As Bayard made no reply, after a minute's pause the young maid-of-honour stammered out between her sobs.

"What message then, Sir, shall I give the Princess Marguerite? whate'er it be, 'twill, I fear, be your last."

Bayard replied firmly, "Maiden, I beg you tell that fair and sweet Princess that, having served her, Bayard hath not lived in vain, and now can die in peace, although by man's injustice, his conscience and his honour clear. Say to that noble and virtuous Princess that, as he may judge her thoughts to run, if he, to choose escape, should act the traitor's part and break the oath he swore, then would she

hold him valueless and all unworthy—and thus would he not live.”

There was silence, save for Anne’s gentle sobbing, in the darkness of the tent, but presently the Chevalier, whose voice was now shaken, resumed.

“Bear to her, maiden, Bayard’s grateful thanks and his loving—loving duty——”

Anne, who knew her mistress and her secret, spoke indignantly.

“Only loving duty! Sir, and you about to leave her—to leave us for ever, and of your own free will too. Even a maid of my age would expect and hope for something warmer as the last message of the man who loved her.”

“The man who loves who, maiden? What mean you?”

“Oh, then you love her not, Sir! then am I to bear those words?”

“Maiden, maiden, who said that I loved her not?” exclaimed Bayard, his heart torn between his religious feelings and the passion seething in his breast.

“Who,” he repeated wildly, “said that I loved or loved not, this great and beauteous lady, whom, by reason of that which hath already transpired in her life, I am not free to love as a true man should love? Yet if, despite that heaven-created barrier the marriage sacrament, by Satan’s subtle urgings, I loved indeed, ay, loved and dared to own it to myself, with love so deep and vast that clouds and firmaments, seas, skies, mountains, rivers, worlds and universes were not great enough to hold that boundless love, which, ever increasing, swelled to huger magnitude with force to tear the planets from the spheres or drench the moon in liquid depths of everlasting night—what message think you then, when drawing nigh my doom, is such as I would send?”

Anne made no reply—she had learned enough for a hundred messages! And yet her young heart was lost in wonderment. Could it then be possible

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that man's love could attain to such heights? 'Twas far beyond her youthful conception of the vastness of the realms of passion. And all this Bayard felt for her dear mistress, and yet was willing to die for a foolish point of honour about an oath of allegiance—a thing that was broken every day!

She remained as in a dream while Bayard's voice ran on. She heard somewhat of what he said, with reference to "when his soul had left this earthly form and should become purged of terrestrial sin," but it interested her not, nor yet some further remarks which bore upon the subject of "the calm content, in which he would have the Princess Marguerite dwell until she too should be called upon to join the celestial spheres." Had the Chevalier not indeed been about to die, the maid-of-honour would have laughed aloud at it all. She had got at Bayard's real feelings and that was all that she cared to remember for the sake of her beloved mistress, and, having learned that much wished to go as soon as possible. For she realised that if he were to be saved at all it would have to be by some means in which he was not personally concerned, and moreover that there was no time to lose if aught were to be accomplished.

When at length Anne rose from the seat which she had been occupying on the floor by Bayard's side, her young heart was, however, torn with compassion as she realised that in all probability she would never meet him living more. Realising his goodness, she begged him therefore for his blessing ere leaving; for, flighty though she might be, the young maid-of-honour felt that she was parting from one whose soul was on a far higher plane than any with whom she had yet met in the giddy Court of France.

Bayard said impressively in reply: "I do bless you, my child, and would beg of you, although in worldly Courts your lot be cast, leave not the path

of virtue, so shall you reach the blessed Courts of heaven! Farewell, maiden, forget not Bayard in your prayers!"

Anne left hurriedly, and the tears were still coursing down her cheeks when she burst into Marguerite's presence, and told her all that had transpired. No sooner had Anne finished her recital than the Princess, causing herself to be cloaked, started, accompanied by various attendants, for the tent of Madame.

After Marguerite had held a private interview with Louise de Savoie, the mother and daughter proceeded to the King's marquee, when, although François was carousing as usual at that hour, he left his guests to join his mother upon the receipt of her message that she would see him at once, and alone. For outwardly François was ever studiously courteous to his mother. It so happened that the King had drunk just enough wine to be in a good humour, and therefore greeted his mother and sister cordially. Seeing him thus, Madame determined to keep him so and only talked at first, laughingly, upon the subject of the young girl Anne de Pisseleu. Perceiving her brother interested in this subject, Marguerite presently took her leave, trusting to her mother's astuteness, when alone, in broaching the subject which Madame had at heart no less than herself.

As the Princess left the Royal marquee, she was perceived by the Admiral, who, forgetful of his recent rebuff would have had the insolence to offer his escort had she not been surrounded by her attendants. Bonnivet, however, followed; he had his suspicions of the Duchesse d'Alençon and resolved to endeavour to watch her, in order to see if his suspicions were correct. Accordingly when the Princess had entered her tent, Bonnivet did not retire but remained strolling about while watching her tent door from a distance.

CHAPTER XVII

A STRANGE LOVE MAKING

WHEN left once more alone after the departure of Anne Boleyn, Bayard's very heart-strings were torn within him, for had not the woman to whom in some wonderful way his heart had gone out from the moment when first her glance had met his, now sent him her loving messages! This great Princess then loved him, the war-worn warrior, ay, deigned to love him, merely a gentleman of noble birth from Dauphiné! Wonderful! Wonderful!

Ah! then surely he would live, although never might he again behold her face, if merely to cherish in his breast the thought of one so sweet, so beautiful, for whom, had she been unmarried, it would have been no crime for him to entertain the feelings a God-fearing knight should nourish for the woman of whom he would make his bride. Now, however, such thoughts were wrong—he must set her image apart, merely think of it as of some Madonna to worship from afar in a manner entirely devoid of earthly passion.

And if this were difficult—ay, well-nigh impossible, then, for his very soul's salvation, would he force his thoughts into other channels.

With a supreme effort of will, the Chevalier began therefore to think merely of his present situation, of the immense ingratitude shewn towards him by the King of France, the man whom himself

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had, by a stroke of the sword on the field of Marignano, admitted to the noble order of Chivalry.

Endeavouring to review the facts, what grounds, Bayard wondered, could François have for accusing him of being the spy of Charles V.? True it was that he had fought side by side at Padua with the gallant old Emperor Maximilian, the grandfather of Charles and his predecessor on the Imperial throne. But had not France then herself been the ally of the Empire, and the French Maréchal La Palice fighting with him? And since that day he had fought against Maximilian and Henry of England combined, again as a leader in a French army, whose defeat he had covered, whose flying rearguard he had saved! Oh! the accusation, the ingratitude was monstrous! monstrous! For the France which he so loved, he now had left Savoy, and, having learned the cunning overtures of Wolsey to the Empire, had sought to checkmate England's King, who still so audaciously bore the Sovereignty of France among his titles.

Soon England surely would be joined with the ambitious Charles, Archduke of Austria, Count omnipotent of all the Netherlands, King of a now united Spain, Emperor of all the German States, Liege Lord of various provinces in France, claimant by descent of Burgundy and Franche Comté, feudal chief, from ancient days, of Lombardy and King of Naples and of Sicily! With all the might of all these States against her in one vast array, what hope could be for France? Yet when came the shock of battle, so sadly mused Bayard, he could not draw the sword for France, he would be dead and buried, foully slain in felon's guise by France's ruler, the Very Christian King! For a minute the Chevalier set his teeth and breathed hard, longed that he were at liberty and,

sword in hand, could join with Bourbon and with Charles of Austria to strike a blow not with but at this treacherous King of France, tear from him his titles, deprive him of his power to wreak injustice!

Then a softer mood intervened, as in his mind's eye the Seigneur de Bayard saw the bloodstained bodies of many old comrades, gallant gentlemen of France, lying trampled in the mire beneath the invading hordes of the Empire. Nay, were he free, he would not draw the sword on France, and, were there no other reason to restrain him, was there not one who was herself a Frenchwoman? Was she not moreover the sister of the Very Christian King?

Ah! there he was! thinking once more of Marguerite de Valois! could he not then cure himself of this madness? Bayard bit his lip and gripped his nails into the palms of his hands with vexation at finding himself to be so weak. He bowed his head upon his manacled hands.

"Far better," thought Bayard, "that in the grave should I be laid than live that, to my soul's damnation, I should for ever carry in mine anguished breast this all too enthralling, all too sweet and yet, alas! unlawful love!"

While the Chevalier was thus alone, struggling to force back from his brain the thoughts which, for all his efforts, would not be repressed, the door of Marguerite's tent was cautiously opened and a woman, cloaked and veiled, looked forth.

She spoke in a low tone of voice to the sentry pacing up and down, who informed her that, since the moon had recently risen, he had seen no one save a seigneur who had been strolling at a distance of about a hundred paces, as though keeping an amorous tryst.

"Perchance he hath now found his lady-love, Madame, or perchance he hath got tired of awaiting her and gone home," said the sentinel, "for 'tis

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now five good minutes since I saw him yonder rounding the corner of the broad alley of tents."

The lady glanced a moment in the direction towards which the soldier pointed with his halberd, and then, perceiving nothing, hurried off rapidly a different way, while smiling beneath her veil.

Some few minutes later, Pierre de Terrail could hear the voice of a woman murmuring in colloquy with the page Louis, and then a female form became apparent in the open doorway, through which the moonlight poured in.

"I find you with your head bowed with grief, Chevalier," exclaimed the lady in low and gentle tones, "yet courage! 'tis ever darkest just before the dawn! I come moreover to endeavour to console you by my presence, do you know me through my veil?"

"Nay Madame, in sooth I know not to whom I have the honour to speak, nor yet methinks, although none but a good heart could prompt such a visit to one condemned to die, do you wisely to be here alone at such an hour! In chains though I be, your fair name might suffer should any see you."

"I thank you, Chevalier, for your thought, yet who knows if I so greatly value my name?—the gentle page yonder will moreover warn me of any intruder, and who it may be, and such knowledge is all I require. Yet said I that 'twas to console you that I came hither, and thus I would bid you not despair, for some who love you work in your interests—your life may be saved!"

Life is dear to all, yet to Bayard there was something still more dear, therefore he replied, as if on the defensive.

"What is life so one be deprived of honour? I trust, lady, that this be no new snare for the entrapping of mine, such as hath already been laid for me this night. If so it be, and you a second messenger sent to entrap a man whom love of life

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might make unwary, then Madame, I beg you say no more, for surely they who love Bayard would not have countenanced your coming hither. Yet who be they who truly love me, already dishonoured, branded falsely with the foul name of spy?" The Chevalier groaned aloud and, at the very thought, bowed his head in grief once more.

The lady who had been standing, now seated herself on the floor of the tent beside Bayard.

Placing her hands upon his chained wrists, she drew them from his face, while saying, airily, "Tush, Seigneur! veiled ladies come not to the tents of noble knights in these days to lure them to dishonour! And who love you indeed? why 'tis well known that half the women present at this Field of Cloth of Gold adore the ever victorious Bayard, either openly or in secret—and—and, why should not I be then one of those who love you?"

"Madame! Madame! bethink you of what you say! these idle words at such a time! to one about to die!" And he sought to withdraw his wrists from the lady's grasp, but, being chained, failed.

At this moment the page was heard to cry out loudly: "Let go my ear! Monsieur l'Amiral, or my master the Constable will make you smart for it! I will not say what lady passed within."

"Then, rascal, will I see for myself if it be she whom I suspect," Bonnivet was heard to reply with a coarse laugh.

Instead, however, of releasing her grasp, the lady now merely shifted it from Bayard's wrists to his hands, while repeating "Ay, noble Seigneur, why should not I be one of those who love you, one of those who from the very fame of your deeds loved you even ere she ever saw your face?"

At this second the Admiral, who had paused without to listen, entered the large tent, the door of which being widely thrown back on account of

the heat presented no obstacle. He could plainly perceive the lady's attitude, distinctly hear her words, moreover, even as he entered, he recognised the voice.

His words shewed his surprise. "What! 'tis not then Madame d'Alençon! Aha! Comtesse, 'tis thus then I find you, making love! So now we are quits! 'twill be a pretty story for the King!"

Throwing back her veil Françoise sprang to her feet and confronted the intruder. "I love, ay, Bonnivet, I love! and with such passion as never woman wasted on the vile Admiral of France—a spy! a would-be ravisher of woman's virtue! a pander to his monarch's pleasures! How dare you thus to mention here the name of that great Princess whom so you injured! what then your vile suspicions? Yet since 'tis me you find, who would be here alone, begone! I say! ay, get you hence and bear your story to your King, vile hound! Begone!"

Stamping her foot in fury at the Admiral, the Comtesse fairly drove him from the tent, cowed so that he could find no word to reply.

Françoise followed the Admiral without and watched until he had disappeared in the distance, then, after a word of commendation and further warning to Louis de Pompéran, re-entered the tent. There, to the infinite surprise of Bayard, who held not the key to the comedy agreed on that morning by the great ladies in the secret, the Comtesse burst into a peal of silvery laughter.

"Forgive me, dear Chevalier," she said, "nor would I laugh thus but I were assured of your safety, forgive me, have I fooled you even almost as the Admiral. Yet 'twas imperative I came hither to deceive him, to save one whose name, unlike mine, is indeed of value, and whom he would slander. And mark you, Bayard," again she laughed, "I told no lie! I said I loved indeed, and said I

loved with passion, yet said I not whom it was I so loved. Should Bonnivet repeat my words to François, or rather when, later, I myself repeat them, then will the King apply them to himself! Oh! 'tis droll! 'tis droll! Yon foppish fool is indeed no match for one born in the house of Foix! Of a verity, shall he be made to regret his foul suspicions of Marguerite. Ay! Madame herself this time shall make him smart for it, or is not my name Françoise!"

Pierre de Terrail could but be gained by the contagion, he laughed for company, ay, and, for another reason, laughed for joy, for with his quick wits he grasped the fact from what a danger Marguerite's name had been saved. From Anne Boleyn he had learned that which, could he but believe it, was sufficient to shew him that the danger to Marguerite's fair name had since the preceding night not been wholly unreal.

In a moment, however, he ceased to laugh, his generous heart had room left in it to think of the position in which Françoise might have placed herself—the anger of the King which she might incur by her own generous action. She, however, reassured him, moreover convinced him that even should the King's anger, which might be aroused, become permanent, no joy for her would be greater than that, of his own free will, François should bid her leave his Court for ever. And hurriedly she recapitulated to him sufficient of the story of her betrayal; and of her weariness of her subsequent life with the King, to persuade Bayard that indeed she spoke the truth.

Yet would she not allow the honest Chevalier to waste time in pitying her, for suddenly she told him that the farce had not yet been played out, that in all probability there would before long be another act, and that this time he himself would be obliged to aid her by taking a part, if but a passive

one, in the comedy. Scarcely had she explained her intentions to the Chevalier and won his consent to her plans, than the voice of the page Louis was once more heard, this time within the door, exclaiming in a low tone :

“Madame! some others are at hand! They bear torches, but I cannot see how many, nor whom they be!”

Quick as an eel, the lad slipped out of the tent again, before the Duc de Bourbon arrived upon the scene to question him.

Hearing the voices, the Comtesse, determined, for a double reason, to keep up the fiction of her having lost her heart to the Chevalier, quickly threw herself upon her knees by his side. It was in an attitude of tender adoration, her head being bent down to the chained hands which she clasped, that she was thus discovered by those entering the large tent. Nor made she any motion to move away.

Behind a couple of archers, bearing torches, came the Duc de Bourbon, with the provost-marshal and two more soldiers, who bore hammers. Behind these was Madame the King's mother, while Madame was followed in turn by the Princess Marguerite. While even the soldiers opened wide their eyes, the Constable for a moment stood still in astonishment. With a voice of authority, he then commanded: “Provost-marshal, do your duty! yet see that your men hurt not yon lady's hands in removing them.” Turning then to Madame, he observed, with a sarcastic smile.

“A touching episode, indeed, this before us! Madame!”

“’Tis disgraceful! my dear cousin of Bourbon,” hissed out Louise spitefully. “Well, at last, the King's eyes will be opened!”

Meanwhile, as the two archers bearing the hammers stood over him, Bayard imagining that they had come to lead him to his death, endeavoured

to draw his fettered wrists away from Françoise. But she clung to him, so that the provost-marshal and his men could not use their hammers, while crying all the while "They shall not kill him! no, you shall not lead away to his death the noblest knight in Christendom!"

As the archers stood bewildered, not daring to lay their hands upon this great lady, the Chevalier addressed the Duc de Bourbon.

"Will the Constable of France inform me wherefore these irons are to be removed. Must I die to-night? Then of your courtesy, fetch me hither a priest that I may be shriven."

Bourbon smiled. "A priest in place of this fair and loving lady! But can you spare her, Seigneur? Yet have I no orders to hang but to release you. Such are the King's commands, and to me they seem but just. Yet methinks," added the Constable with haughty insolence, "scant had been the justice of the Very Christian King had it not been for Madame, whom you behold present in person to see that justice duly executed."

"Ay, Bayard," exclaimed Louise de Savoie excitedly. "I spoke plainly to the King, and he listened to my words, saw the madness of believing you could be the spy of any man, least of all of our foolhardy cousin the young Emperor. And thus behold us, my daughter and myself, to see that you are set at liberty. Yet," added Madame, pointing scornfully at the Comtesse, "whether you can as easily be free of this brazen woman is another matter. What have I not always said of her, my dear Bourbon? I beg you now order your soldiers to free the Seigneur of this all too pressing creature!"

The Comtesse laughed derisively. "Since you come not to hang him, the attentions of your archers are not required." Leaving go of Bayard's hands, she rose to her feet, confronting Madame and Bourbon in a defiant manner—perceiving which

the Constable, who was indeed considerably puzzled, remarked to Louise,

"Madame, this scene is amazing and unexpected. Yet by it is one story told by which another is disproven. What says my cousin Madame d'Alençon? How evident now indeed the lies of her mincing traducer Bonnivet! He surely now should lie where Bayard lies, and in his chains! yet words are useless while the King loves that scoundrel." Turning to the soldiers he added abruptly, "Wherefore waste you your time?—knock off those fetters!"

"I pray you, archers, remove them carefully, so that you harm not this noble Seigneur," exclaimed Marguerite gently, as she stepped forward. At the same time a meaning glance was exchanged between her and Françoise, to whose arm she contrived, unperceived to give a little grateful squeeze.

As the fetters were removed, Madame sprang to the front in turn, and, rudely pushing the Comtesse to one side, she seized the Chevalier by both arms and helped him to rise.

He stammered forth his thanks for her kindness towards him yet, while apparently looking towards Madame, his eyes, full of gratitude, involuntarily sought those of the Princess, her daughter, standing behind her. And Marguerite's violet eyes, widely dilated—what a story they now told! 'Twas fortunate that none save Françoise saw their glance, for had but Bourbon perceived it the whole of the comedy as played by the Comtesse would indeed have been of none effect. Nor were the soldiers present to observe, for they had retired with the chains.

Madame saw not either that the direction of Bayard's glance was over her shoulder, as she addressed him volubly. "Sir Pierre de Terrail, I would have you know that my noble brother, the ruler of Savoy and Piedmont, hath often spoken

so of you to me that none, I know, can own more true and loyal heart. And thus, now to his senses he hath returned, will think the King my son. Ah! here is the King himself! —Welcome my son! you come in nick of time to see reversal of a great injustice—for which, however, it is not you your mother blames. Yet well have you done not to bring hither with you that pampered minion Bon-nivet, the wicked author of a cruel deed—the daring villain who attempts your sister's honour, yet goes unpunished! Now François, be you man as well as King of France, list to your mother's words. Here in your mother's and your sister's presence, before the Constable of France as well, tell this most honest Seigneur greatly do you mourn this great mishap, this wrongful insult you have put upon him."

Despite his tall stature and handsome bearing, the King presented but a sheepish appearance while listening to these words. He was without the presence of his favourite to back him, and could but notice that the glances of all, including above all those of Françoise, were hostile to him. Weak as he was, François made a brave show of generous and manly strength as, stretching forth his hand, he exclaimed: "Bayard, your pardon we crave. We have been misled and beg you take our hand and shew forgiveness. We freely own you are a true, a noble and a loyal knight, no spy indeed, and greatly grieve this insult to your well-known honour."

Bayard bowed ceremoniously, but did not at once accept the hand of the man who had been about to have him strung up as though he were a common sheep-stealer. Yet he replied fearlessly, and generously enough under the circumstances.

"Sire," said he, "all ills I have suffered at your hands are forgiven. God wot! I bear no rancour, for of yourself you surely did not this wrong, but

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listened to another. For kings like courtiers, may be ill-advised. Thus should a mighty monarch, one to whose bright example all eyes turn for guidance, select with care his counsellors. Him whom I saw last night, with foul and felon hands assault this your honoured sister," he paused and turned towards Marguerite to whose cheeks a little colour arose, "your honoured sister this great Princess, is not one on whom the leader of a nation's honour can lean and still learn justice. Sire, I would make bold to say, you should be cautious where you choose your friends!"

The dauntlessness of this speech angered the King. His face reddened with vexation as he answered: "Ha! you venture to reprove, Seigneur de Bayard! you would question those upon whom we repose our friendship!"

Looking the King straight in the face, Bayard replied unflinchingly: "Sire, in the presence of your mother, in the presence of your virtuous and greatly outraged sister, I venture so to do. Nor," he added turning towards the Princesses, "will they gainsay me."

None spoke, although the Chevalier waited as for a reply—he therefore again addressed François, "Sire, I say, and say it in the sight of that God to whom he would have sent me as in the sight of man, that the Very Christian King should not consort with one like Bonnivet, to make his soul the mirror of his mud-bedizened mind, to act as spokesman for his evil thoughts, become the agent for his evil deeds." Holding up his hand as though to call heaven as witness to his words Pierre de Terrail concluded, in impressive and emphatic tones. "Had Bayard known the mighty King of glorious France could stoop to listen to such yelping, lecherous hound, he had not dubbed him knight at Marignano!"

All within the tent were aghast at Bayard's

boldness—the King more than all, for he felt that this man was too great for him, he feared the outspoken lash of his words. Attempting, however, to put as good a face as possible upon the matter, he answered, almost pleadingly: “Bayard! you would not anger me? We have offered you our hand as man to man! As King and comrade both, our fault have we confessed. Will you not take that hand, since yourself did make us knight and thus, we own, did honour us? Listen then further. Last night we drank too deeply, and when came the morn were cross and bearish, not our usual selves, and thus acted in peevish haste. Yet, Seigneur, we beg you leave our friends alone, upon our own shoulders only lay your blame, as once you laid your sword, for broad enough are they to bear the one as once they bore the other, ay, and to profit by them both.”

The King had now spoken in a manly manner, and Bayard, recognising this fact, laid aside his attitude of stern reproof in his reply.

“Sire, as a man have you spoken, and therefore as a man I take the hand in friendship offered, and further, to you as my King, to whom I have sworn fealty, I place my lips upon it.”

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CHALLENGE

PIERRE DE TERRAIL having thus accepted the *amende honorable* made to him by François, the incident of his unjust arrest was closed in so far as the Chevalier and the King were concerned. There were, however, other questions on the tapis, and Madame lost no time in raising one of them by the remark :

“My son, you have done well, and, on behalf of your uncle of Savoy, I thank you, and Pierre de Terrail hath borne himself likewise as should an honourable gentleman. Yet are there now other matters, my son. Behold here the Comtesse de Châteaubriand, she whom it hath pleased you to make your second Queen, she who would rule us all as though we were her subjects ! My son, to you she is unfaithful, in thought if not in deed. Here found we her, languishing with love for Bayard—a very scandal ! She kissed his hands in fond and foolish fashion before our very presence. Scarce could the archers approach to strike the fetters from the Chevalier ! ’Tis time, I say, you rid the Court of such an one, she is a common woman !”

The King looked angrily at Françoise, but she shewed fear neither in her bearing nor in her sarcastic reply, addressed to Madame.

“Who was languishing but now, and that in the very archers’ presence, to her *dear* Bourbon ?”

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Madame flushed crimson, but the King interposed before she could speak.

"My mother, we heard somewhat of this upon our way hither, and 'tis an insult that we should resent. Our honour is in question and thus, although Bayard be friend and though we hold him blameless, yet 'tis with him that must the quarrel lie. Cousin of Bourbon, Constable of France, to you we look in this matter, now must you represent your King!"

The Constable looked the King in the face with a haughty stare, he then turned towards the Comtesse surveying her with disdain, ere answering witheringly, with a disagreeable laugh.

"What, Sire! would you have me quarrel over your *affaires de cœur*? right your private misadventures with your light o' love? Then, Sire, must you learn that Charles de Bourbon fights for no King's strumpet—such quarrels are not for the First Prince of the Blood!"

Springing forward, Françoise shook her fist in Bourbon's face. "Strumpet! you dare to call me that vile name, Constable! yet shall you live to rue that 'strumpet'! so tells you one whose blood is good as yours!—ay better, since lacking its pollutions."

"Peace! Comtesse!" exclaimed François who, while with one hand he pushed her to one side, faced Bourbon with a look of un mistakeable hatred. "Sir," he demanded fiercely, "would you play the rebel to your King? ay, that would you, indeed, we know; for well we read your heart and its ambitions! Yet now, perchance, 'tis Bayard's sword you fear, you think, maybe, that we would have a traitor slain?"

The Constable's dark face became as black as night. "Sire, no King nor other man shall speak to me thus," he was commencing furiously, when Madame, white with emotion, laid her hand upon her lover's mouth.

"Bourbon, listen not!" she said, "nor answer back your King, yet is not this quarrel yours. I

would not have my affianced husband intervene in aught concerning this most presuming woman."

Bayard now stepped forward and spoke, with dignity, addressing Louise de Savoie. "Madame, with all courtesy, this is the tent of Bayard, and none who seek its hospitality, by doing so presume. This lady's mission hither was but of charity to one about to die, I pray you Madame therefore choose another time and place for your upbraidings. Yet ill they come from noble lips of great Princesses such as Louise de Savoie!" Then, turning to Bourbon, the Chevalier added. "For you, Sir Constable, your speech to yon fair dame most sorely lacks in chivalry, 'tis all unbecoming of a gentleman! Yet have we other cause for quarrel, already have you had my challenge for that you hither stood and called me spy—well knowing that in doing so you lied. And liar now I brand you, Bourbon! yet not for that alone but other matters known but to us twain."

So saying, picking up his glove from a table upon which it was lying, Bayard lightly with it struck the Constable across the face. In a second, Bourbon had whipped his sword from out its sheath and raised it as if about to cut down the Chevalier, who merely stood smiling derisively at this unknightly action.

The smile hurt Bourbon, who, as he sheathed his weapon again with a clang, observed fiercely. "You are unarmed, Bayard, or had I stricken you to the ground. With fifty men aside this quarrel shall be settled. The lists shall see it decided to-morrow's morn."

"Fifty noble gentlemen of Savoy would gladly follow Bayard in a righteous cause, yet should their blood be saved to fight for France, should she ere long have need. That such may prove the case none better than the Duc de Bourbon know," added the Chevalier, with a meaning glance. Before this the Constable allowed his eyes to fall, for his

conscience pricked him who knew how nobly Pierre de Terrail had, when himself accused, concealed his plottings, was even yet concealing them. As he remembered, his determination not to fight Bayard returned, could he escape from doing so and yet save his honour—but not now would he shew the spark of real nobility which his swarthy warlike features so well concealed. It seemed that fight he must, yet, calling to mind that Bayard's men-at-arms had been sent away, he answered haughtily. "With fifty men-at-arms behind us or not at all, Seigneur. A Prince of the Blood is not seen in any quarrel with a less following."

To this Bayard bowed ceremoniously—making no response. Madame, however, now was guilty of one of those solecisms which made not herself alone but Bourbon look foolish in the eyes of all. Going up to him, in a tender manner she presented him with her glove, observing, "'Tis under this token that my affianced must go to the combat, thus, while thinking of me, will his arm be the better nerved,"

While all smiled save Pierre de Terrail, the Duc de Bourbon, unable to conceal his feelings, made an actual grimace. He hesitated, turned to look apologetically at his cousin the Princess Marguerite, and would if he dared have refused his mother's glove. Louise de Savoie, however, was pressing it upon him in an endearing manner, therefore, rather than prolong a ridiculous situation, the Constable at length somewhat ungraciously accepted the gauntlet of his middle-aged lady love.

This incident gave to Françoise her opportunity. Making a sweeping ironical curtsy to Madame, she observed sneeringly:

"Since love tokens are to be the rule, may 'that presuming woman' the 'King's strumpet'—here she looked witheringly at Bourbon—"be allowed to offer one also, to one of whom she thinks as highly as any man in France? Seigneur de Bayard," she

added, "since partly on my poor account is, so it would seem, this encounter to take place I pray that you will not disdain to carry in your crest the glove of one who so greatly hath been maligned?"

As the Comtesse, with a gracious smile, held out her glove to the Chevalier, the King dashed forward. Striking the glove to the ground, ere Bayard had had time to grasp it, he shouted:

"Rather would we see you dead, Françoise! Moreover, now would we know the meaning of this folly? Explain yourself, Madame!"

The Comtesse who was in one of those ugly moods by which she was so often able to keep the King under her thumb, shewed not the slightest alarm at his petulance. On the contrary, she looked François up and down superciliously from head to foot ere, slowly, at length she deigned to take notice of his angry demand.

"Explain myself, Sire! methinks 'tis not from me the explanations are due! Was it not you who took me, all unwilling, from my husband, to make of my name a mockery for worthless arrogant jackdaws?" Pausing and raising her beautifully arched eyebrows, Françoise looked at the Constable. Then the Comtesse resumed speaking, with calm and firm decision. "Sire, I will not be questioned; if you like not my ways, allow me to depart. Enough have I had of your Court, of your mother, of your Constable and, above all of your Bonnivet, a despicable wretch from whose tongue and outrages no woman, however highly placed, is safe!" Turning to the Princess, her tone softened. "Marguerite, in this you at least will support me?"

"Indeed will I, dear Françoise," answered Marguerite softly, and, moving over to her friend, with gentle dignity she took her arm as though to protect the Comtesse against them all.

After a look of gratitude into the face of the Princess, Françoise continued. "Sire, I have a

request to make to you, and make it before all present that none may henceforward say that 'the common woman,' one in whose veins, Sire, flows your own Royal blood, desires to remain at Court seeking her own advantages. And this the request, that she be allowed henceforth to retire, she would be free! Although the husband whom you have outraged, Sire, may vengeful seek her life, for your misdeeds, not hers, yet, doubt it not, others will she find to give her head a shelter from the summer's heat—the winter's storm!"

"Françoise," observed the King, jealously, "what mean you by all this?"

Dropping Marguerite's arm, the Comtesse stepped up to the King and replied simply. "Sire, my meaning is, methinks, plain enough, it is that I would go—and for ever! Nor will you miss me, for well I know you, others can take my place. Madame hath a favourite, one Anne de Pisseleu, a child as yet, but not so young nor yet so coy but you could doctrine her to fill"—she here turned with a curl of her lip to Louise de Savoie—"a common woman's common offices."

François might be ready and willing enough himself to discard a woman when he might feel so inclined, but to allow her to go of her own free will—to leave him in the lurch while she still was of use to him—that was another matter!

He answered therefore decisively: "Nay, Françoise, this shall not be. Full well you know you cannot go, we cannot spare you!"

"Not yet!" interposed the Comtesse, shrugging her shoulders.

"We cannot spare you," repeated the King, "nor shall any man wear your favours in his helm. No favours shall indeed be worn by any, be he Constable or Chevalier," he added, "for we forbid the combat. You hear us, Seigneurs! this encounter is forbidden, our gentlemen's lives are all too precious, we cannot

spare an hundred men at such a time as this, nor would we have our English guests hear talk of such affray."

The Constable, who had in his heart been ready enough to forego the fight a moment earlier, felt all his spirit of opposition aroused, his haughty temper determined him to disobey the King. For this reason alone, taking his gauntlet he gently drew it across the Chevalier's face while saying: "Pierre de Terrail, I give you back your insults!" Then turning to the King, the Duc de Bourbon queried, in an insolent tone.

"Now, Sire, can you forbid the combat? or are our lives indeed all too precious?"

The King was beside himself with rage at being thus openly flouted by his cousin Bourbon, whose daring indeed increased daily, yet whose power was so great that he felt himself helpless against him. Hot with anger, he stamped his foot, exclaiming: "This quarrel hath now become our own! Bayard, will you become our champion, to chastise this haughty rebel?"

"Sire," answered Bayard, "name but the time and place! mine arm was ready to strike for mine honour, now likewise shall it strike for my King!"

"'Tis well, Chevalier, nor shall you than he be less honoured in the fray. My mother, all too fond, would give to this insolent Prince her glove! Marguerite my sister, and you love your brother, I pray you now bestow a favour on that brother's champion!"

The Princess, who had felt greatly distressed throughout the whole of the interview, looked bewildered. She did not, above all things, wish to seem to oppose her mother who, acting on her request, had begged Bayard's life from the King. He, however, seeing her indecision, spoke in a tone of command. "Sister, I order you, as your Sovereign Lord."

"Then will these colours on my bosom serve," answered Marguerite falteringly. With trembling fingers, she detached some ribbons from her breast and handed them to Bayard, with a look which seemed to imply—"May they lead you to victory."

"God will protect the right, Madame!" exclaimed the Chevalier, as, kneeling, he kissed the much loved hand, and accepted the badge that had lain on Marguerite's heart.

CHAPTER XIX

AMONG THE GOLDEN TREES

THE news of the impending conflict between such noble champions as the First Prince of the Blood of France and the Seigneur de Bayard was not a matter which could be kept secret, especially as, the Chevalier's men-at-arms being at a distance, the encounter could not take place at once. Bayard likewise was anxious that his brother-in-arms Fleurange should be given the opportunity, if he desired, of riding by his side in the combat—which, by the order of the King of France, was postponed for several days.

François could not, however, conceal his anxiety that the lives of so many other than the principals should be risked in the quarrel, of which the cause was kept secret. Since the matter had become the subject of general conversation among the English as well as the French, he expressed himself one day plainly on the subject to King Henry, who, anxious to lose no opportunity of falling in with the merry Anne Boleyn, was constantly to be seen in the French camp if nominally but as the boon companion of his Brother France.

"Gadzooks! that's true, 'tis pity," observed Henry, "yet see we a remedy, and one that will terminate this our meeting in right joyous fashion, for alack!" he heaved a sigh, observing the object of his adoration not far away, "our merry days are fast drawing to a close."

"A remedy! What can it be, Brother England?" exclaimed François, his eye brightening. "Our Constable, haughty dog, as well you named him! vows that with less than fifty behind him he will not fight and 'tis his privilege—scarce could we gainsay the First Prince of the Blood in the matter."

"Our remedy is simple, Brother France, gainsay him not but make the numbers more! give him not fifty but an hundred as a following, and to Bayard likewise."

François laughed derisively. "A pretty remedy!" he exclaimed, "you would then kill off all our noble gentlemen!"

"Nay, nay, good François," responded Henry jovially, "by our halidame! no designs have we on France—an hundred English knights would join as well. These latter days our sports have become somewhat tame—stale by repetition, our gentlemen of England long for something new and fret now to be excluded. This then have we designed—a mimic battle as our last glorious fête, ay, a *pas d'armes* in which ourselves can likewise ride, yet all with blunted weapons save our leaders. Bourbon shall head one party, the other Pierre de Terrail, while each from our English champions shall choose a name in turn. See, here have we rolls of names! We twain, the better our amity to display, will enter the fray as comrades, riding side by side. Yet," added Henry thoughtfully, "methinks that we would ride with Bayard."

"And likewise we ourselves, good Henry! and 'twill be a glorious sight for all the bright eyes of both our Courts to gaze upon. 'Tis well designed indeed, a battle in miniature to last an hour, by the trumpet sound, from start to finish; for longer in this summer heat could we scarce endure. But let us to the Princesses and talk the matter over."

The Queens and other great ladies of the Court

were delighted at the idea of a *pas d'armes*, between so many of the knights and men-at-arms, one which, all the barriers of the lists being removed, was to resemble real warfare as much as possible. The ladies having made up their minds upon the matter, neither Bourbon nor Bayard, who were consulted, had any objection to offer, as they were to engage each other. Should they become separated in the *melée*, so 'twas decided, they were to strike and be stricken by none other, but to continue to lead their respective parties as if in actual war.

By the request of Madame, the lists of English names were produced. "Chetwode, Crevequer, Swynnerton, Latimer, Willoughby, Howard, Talbot, Clifford, Brereleigh, Chandos, Villiers, Crawford, Hungerford, Bruce," and so on. These Henry commenced to read out, most of these English gentlemen being well known to all, their blazoned shields having often been seen in the lists, and, as all coats-of-arms were recognised, a knight might as well have borne his name upon his shield. Henry continued the reading until an hundred names had been mentioned.

François had observed that his mother had ordered one of the pages to bring an inkhorn, pen and paper, before she had asked for the reading of the roll, and further that, as the reading continued, Louise de Savoie every now and then turned to make a sign to the page, who wrote down a name. He made no remark, but shrewd as he was, understood well that his mother, keenly anxious for the success of Bourbon's party, was carefully and deliberately selecting beforehand the names of all those who had most distinguished themselves, intending to give them to the Constable. With a view to checkmating his mother, he remarked, at length, casually: "Brother England, would you add more names, then ourselves would

do likewise, methinks the battle would be better so ? ”

“ Ay, another hundred if need be, and right willingly, the more the merrier ! as we of England say ! ”

“ And we the same, good Henry, thus shall we be in all four hundred men-at-arms, and that with three attendants to each lance, 'twill make sixteen hundred men on the field, to each side eight hundred. Yet, save for their own fifty followers, by them appointed, with their attendants, nor should Bourbon nor Bayard pick or choose, but draw the names of others at random from a sack. How say you ? ”

“ We say that thus it should be done, it is, in sooth, the fairer plan,” replied Henry, who likewise had observed Madame's little manœuvre, and who, as he had determined to fight as one of Bayard's party, was not particularly pleased to observe that when it came to the selection of names he might possibly be left on the weaker side.

While Madame was compelled to hide her disappointment, the plans of the coming mock battle were further discussed, it being decided that, to make the conflict more realistic, each party should be concealed from the other behind separate hills, and upon the trumpet being sounded, charge from their hiding places in such formation as their skilful leaders should command. Thus would there indeed be a glorious show !

While this conversation was taking place, those interested in it were standing by the lists, watching some chariot races in imitation of those of ancient classic days ; these were an innovation due to the invention of the English King. Presently becoming tired of these races, in which the English drivers were continually the winners, François, beckoning to Bonnivet to join him, retired to his marquee, saying that he was athirst. Bayard, perceiving that an

accident had taken place in the distance, likewise took his departure, in order to help in righting the chariot which had been upset and of which the horses were kicking furiously.

Bourbon would have left likewise, but Madame, in her anxiety for his safety in the coming combat, insisted upon retaining him by her side, upon the excuse of talking over the details.

There remained Marguerite, with whom was Anne Boleyn, and the English King. The latter, seizing the opportunity when Louise de Savoie was most *empresée* in her attentions to the reluctant Constable, cunningly proposed to the Princess that they should follow Bayard to investigate the accident that had happened near the starting-post, and thus discover to what noble the horses which were causing the trouble might belong.

Marguerite readily accepted the invitation, nor, preoccupied as she was, did she for a time even notice that Henry was directing all his conversation to her maid-of-honour. Even when, at last, she became aware of the fact that His Grace of England had contrived to fall behind with Anne, she was indifferent. She felt indeed that she wanted for once to be alone, absolutely alone, and walked on. As the chariot which had been upset now came galloping up the lists long after its competitors had passed, there seemed to be every possibility that her wish would be granted, for a time at least. It was the last of the chariot races, and Henry, having captured Anne Boleyn, would not be likely to allow her to join her mistress again in any hurry, whether the saucy maiden were anxious to do so or no.

Marguerite reached the end of the lists, where now was no-one, and paced on dreamily into the thick grove of artificial trees, whose leaves were of green silk, trunks of gold and branches of silver. No sooner had she advanced a few paces than, seated upon an ornamental seat behind a large,

natural, but gilded tree trunk, she came upon a man, one who like herself was lost in thought. So light was her footfall on the sward that he had not heard the approach of Marguerite, nor, so concealed was he, had she perceived him until on rounding the trunk she was herself about to be seated. Then the Princess and Bayard found themselves face to face — they were absolutely alone together.

A flush rose to Marguerite's face, but, without hesitation, she exclaimed: "The Holy Virgin be thanked that this meeting hath chanced, for greatly have I wished to meet you, Bayard. Nay, rise not! let us be seated for once side by side, and forget all foolish ceremony of the Court, ay, forget all that we would not remember, and perchance," she added, with a little smile, "remember some of those things which in the future fate would have us forget. Bayard, friend, give me your hand, and tell me that you forgive me. Yet hath it not been all my fault, and now so much have I to say to you that scarce, methinks, can the words come quick enough to carry my meaning."

"Princess," replied Pierre de Terrail fervently, "indeed there is naught for me to forgive, would you then pain me by speaking thus?"

"Princess!—why always that Princess?" exclaimed the lovely woman petulantly, as she gripped the hand which held her own. "Could you not call me Marguerite for this one time? Answer me, Pierre. Yours is the name of him who holds the keys of heaven, and thus to me most precious, therefore I can but utter it! And I too am called after a Saint—to name me therefore surely is no sin!" She laughed lowly, with head thrown a little to one side, while making this casuistical reasoning, one at which Bayard could but smile, while answering.

"Sainte Marguerite is indeed a name I would love often to have upon my lips, but without the Sainte it would be"—he hesitated.

“It would be but what?” exclaimed the beautiful Princess anxiously, while fearing the reply, “’tis but one word I ween! Yet would I hear it!”

Bayard met the violet eyes—he could not find it in his now throbbing heart to say, “unbecoming,” which was the word that duty seemed to prompt. He paused for a second and then said simply: “Marguerite!”

The woman by his side breathed a sigh of rapture.

“Ah! at last then, Pierre, have I lived for one moment of happiness!” Before Bayard was aware of her intention, the Princess was upon her knees at his feet, her lips laid tenderly upon his hand. “Ah!” she sighed again, “now must you hear me, Pierre, for I would not have you think me unwomanly or unfeeling, yet is explanation due since to you now I surely owe it. I came not to you in your tent, when, in my place, Françoise came to comfort you, as I would have done, because I was watched, and knew it, for I was having the watcher watched in turn. Yet what it cost me to see another go, when none but I should have gone to you, lying still in deadly peril, you Pierre, can never, never, know!”

She raised her beautiful eyes to his, and they were wet with tears, perceiving which Bayard felt as though his very heart would break, never had such tenderness overcome him. He bent lower over her, and their heads were near as Marguerite continued rapidly, in a low tone.

“But half have you heard of my confession, which but began when, by my little Anne, I sent you my loving messages. For while revealing thus to you the secret of my heart, a secret then, not now, I knew your secret also. Our secret is the same, and that the reason I may not by you be deemed unwomanly. We love each other, true! yet first, Bayard, did you declare your love for me. From your own lips I learned it, uttered aloud one night

when kneeling before the Queen of Beauty's tribune. I was concealed within behind the flags, and with your hand you touched me here on the heart—even as now you do," she pressed his hand convulsively to her breast. "Ay, touched me," she continued, "so that my beating heart almost cried aloud, that you might hear its secret as I your own. Now, Pierre, the story's out, the tale is told! Yet haply now would you deny those words I was not meant to hear, those words 'I love the Princess Marguerite'?"

"Nay, nay, I deny naught, 'twas the cry from my heart to heaven, by whom alone I deemed it heard."

"Ah! should you deny it, then were I surely crushed with shame, 'twould be as 'twere to say I had pursued you, reasonless, sending to demand your presence that night you saved me from that great disaster! Had you loved not, I had not sent, and thus had I been ruined, Bayard! And yet in sending did I but reply to one who in his heart had called me, ay, even with his lips!"

"'Tis true, sweet Marguerite, and true, alas! henceforward ever must I call you thus, yet with my heart alone, within whose cells for evermore that calling must be hidden. No more my lips must whisper so that you, or even I, may hear that which uttered aloud would seem unholy sacrilege."

"Nay, Pierre, not so, to me 'tis nearer sacrament—the love of a Bayard! misname it not, I pray! Nor will you ever more forget the answer hath been spoken, while here, within, for ever is that answer written." With a gentle motion, Marguerite laid her hand upon her bosom as she uttered these words, the truth of which was vouched for by the look of absolute devotion with which they were accompanied.

For a few seconds they remained gazing into each other's eyes, in silence, for while by a thousand deep emotions each was swayed, these could not be

expressed. Yet each understood the other, Bayard knew the woman's tender weakness, she read, behind his tenderness, his strength, felt, however, that it was trembling in the balance.

He spoke at length. "Marguerite, from this time forth we never more must meet as now ; henceforth you will be the Princess I the knight, far severed as the poles, to meet as strangers while walking, haply, side by side, if life be spared to us. Yet, God forgive me that I say it, the memory of this hour will to me ever be so sweet 'twill seem as though it had been passed in very Paradise, and with me there an angel ! Now, Marguerite, arise ! no longer can my heart such tenderness endure ! I am but human ! Though I may seem in heaven yet wildly the thoughts within me course, with gathering madness while feeling you thus near, that, should I listen longer to them, 'tis hell they'll lead me to but not to heaven ; nor, such the Tempter's promptings, should I give way, 'tis not alone that thither would I travel ! Arise, sweet Marguerite, for ever now we part and say farewell ! "

As the Princess made not the slightest effort to move from the attitude into which she had thrown herself at the knees of the noble gentleman whom she loved so blindly, Bayard bent still further over her, while extending both arms to raise her from the sward.

Marguerite was in an ecstasy. Carried away by the depths of her passion, by which she was thrilled with an unknown sensation of delirious happiness, she threw herself forward within those arms stretched forth to lift her. She raised her face as she felt their touch, raised it oblivious of everything save that she had at last learned what it was that the birds sang of in the spring, that the poets too had sung from time immemorial. Was she not now within the arms of her hero ? even if he himself had told her that it was for

the first time and the last that ever thus could they meet. And their eyes were reading into each others' very souls. Love is stronger than all things!—by neither was there any voluntary motion made—and yet, by some magnetic attraction, their faces were drawn together, tenderly their lips met—they kissed who had not meant to kiss.

Bayard awoke the sooner from the dream. “Now must we part,” he said—“maybe ’twill be harder should we longer delay. You must leave me, and for ever, Marguerite!” He put her gently but firmly from him.

The Princess, who was trembling from head to foot with emotion, stood irresolute. She held out her hands pleadingly to Bayard, who now stood likewise. She would have returned to his sheltering arms, but he waved her gently away.

“Adieu! dear Marguerite!”

“Pierre, my beloved, farewell!”

Slowly she turned and paced away through the thick grove of artificial trees. It was evening and Anne Boleyn was nowhere in sight. Meeting none, Marguerite walked up the whole length of the lists ere she fell in with her favourite, running to meet her, hurriedly, as if fearing a reprimand for having played the truant.

The Princess was not, however, in a mood to reprimand anybody, on the contrary, she kissed Anne—who wondered.

Meanwhile Bayard remained in the grove of trees—alone with his thoughts. He, however, felt that a severe reprimand was surely due to somebody. That somebody was himself, but he deferred it until a more fitting season than that evening.

CHAPTER XX

ANNE'S ALLITERATION

THE Princess Marguerite was happy, for having in her head the French maxim "what woman wills, God wills," she was not appalled by the Chevalier's words to the effect that no more must they meet save as strangers. 'Twas Bayard who had said that, not she ! and—well, time would shew !

If happy, Marguerite was also distraite, so much so that she did not notice that Anne's eyes, like her own, were bright with unusual animation. While the Princess was pensive, the maid-of-honour was, however, wreathed in girlish smiles, at her own thoughts apparently, since naught was said for some time as she stepped along by the side of her mistress. This latter led the way in a direction away from all the tents, towards the little stream in the neutral ground which divided the French from the English territory.

Arrived at the banks of the purling brook, Marguerite seated herself, motioning to Anne to do likewise. At length, as if expressing her thoughts aloud, Marguerite exclaimed with a gentle sigh. "Oh ! he was splendid—I felt my whole soul go out to him."

"Who ? Bourbon ?" enquired Anne mischievously. "Ay, Madame, more splendid to-day than usual, and yet not soulful but saturnine. His looks at you were bold moreover, yet would I see one with an expression more lively."

"I meant not Bourbon, but Bayard, Anne, saw

you ever such brilliant eyes?—and yet in them something saintly, heavenly!”

“Saintly enough, Madame, yet prefer I something with more of a spice of the devil in it. King Hen—I would say that handsome squire L’Allègre, for instance. Yet forgive me, Princess, that I observed the look in your own lovely eyes when a certain knight was not far away. They were heavenly indeed! oh! would but some Royal Prince gaze on me with such a raptured glance. I vow ’twould be delightful!”

“My eyes, child! you see too much. I trust that I but bore myself with seemly grace—that none observed? How did I look?”

“Sweet Mistress, chide not your Anne should she answer truly—now watch me! It was as this you looked, as though trying to gaze through a stone wall farther than others can see.”

Marguerite laughed at the round eyes made by her maiden, while answering, “Anne, all stone walls may not contain a heart of flint!”

“Yet Madame, if ’twas perchance upon a flint you gazed, then surely must your glance, as ray of brightest star, have struck upon it as a steel, to kindle answering spark, ay, my dear Mistress, a spark to blaze into a flame undying.” Anne sighed, moved by the poetry of her own fervid imagination, ere she continued. “Now should His Grace King Hen—I mean should L’Allègre the squire—he really is well favoured, Madame, if passing stout for his years—but gaze on me with such entrancing, piercing glance, oh, then I know full well that my flinty heart would turn to—turn to—yet would I not say it, my Princess, I would not shock you.” And Anne tittered merrily.

“Anne,” replied the Princess, amused but puzzled. “Your nonsense oft enlivens me. Yet have I not noticed that the handsome squire is fat—and tell me, kitten, for to know would be diverting, what would your flinty heart turn to?”

"Madame, my flinty heart would change to free-stone or some substance flimsy, flabby and felicitous —'twould melt into something feeling, friendly and possibly feverish. And yet, my dear Mistress, schooled by the heroines of your happy love romances, outwardly would my bearing be frantic, furious, ay even frenzied."

Marguerite patted Anne's rosy cheek. "What a quantity of 'f's,' saucy girl; to my mind they surely denote frivolity, yet how learned you them all?"

"Madame, blame the Comtesse Françoise. But two days since she took me to task, said I thought of naught but men, was never happy when none were at hand, made monstrous accusations! 'Twas partly true, Princess, for I would study character, and in the other sex I find it most diverting. I did but answer her, well would she do to practise as she preached, when she replied, again, with good advice I had not asked for."

"Good advice to you, Anne! I fear 'twas wasted —yet what the nature of her counsels?"

"She bade me follow some pursuit, train my young mind in my leisure hours and thus lay up a store of wisdom for old age; or, if amusement I would ever seek, find it within myself, rely on my own resources, not let my foolish brain be ever occupied with naught but gay and giddy gallants. Oh, Madame, 'twas a very lecture! yet in her preaching saw I sense, thus I resolved to profit by it. Now, Madame, see you the meaning of the 'f's'?"

"Nay indeed, and well you know it, for now you mock me, naughty Anne, with all this story of the Comtesse—yet what the reading of your riddle?"

"The answer is most simple, now, when no man is nigh to entertain me, I train my brain by practising alliteration. It comes most easy, scarce now would I speak in other guise, the amusement is alluring. Yet, fearing to weary you, my dear Princess, whose sapient mind is full of deeper

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thoughts, I have refrained from tiring you with that which you would doubtless term my nonsense."

"Nay child," replied the Princess, "since it hath required such deep thought, I should have said your art. Yet is it not too late, for me to learn the secret of your pastime—to me alliteration comes not over easy, yet oft when writing verse I need its flow, so therefore, pray, display to me more of this your new-found talent."

"Oh, would you hear me! well, my Mistress dear, 'tis thus within my thoughts I speak of those with whom those thoughts have mostly been concerned: Henry is huge, handsome, hard to hinder but heavenly. Bonnivet is bumptious, badly dressed, brutal and beastly. Bourbon is bold, brisk, boorish, but neither bourgeois nor bonny."

"That is a specimen, Madame," exclaimed Anne laughingly. "Is it sufficient, or shall I continue? Bayard comes next!"

"Nay, continue kitten! Methinks it would be pity to stay your tongue when well started, and the alliteration is, as you rightly say, alluring."

Anne knitted her brows and looked at her fair mistress with a puzzled air.

"I would continue, my Princess, ay willingly. Yet am I most forgetful; whom was it I said but now that next was on the list? Oh! who was it?" She thumped her forehead in perplexity, while looking appealingly at her mistress.

Marguerite flushed a little. "Was it not Bayard, little tease?"

"Ah, Madame my thanks! for you, I perceive, are not forgetful! It was indeed Bayard, and to him you well must listen, for many are his attributes, all beginning with a B.

"For Bayard is beautiful, he is benevolent, brilliant, beneficent, brave, ay—brave," Anne repeated, "and something more which I will not say."

"Nay, tell me what he is more, Anne?"

"Brave and beloved by a beautiful Princess, to whom, were it not for his retiring nature, would he less rarely than now raise his ravishing eyes with rays of rapturous devotion! That is all, Madame."

"Yet maybe that gallant seigneur is all the more worthy for his reticence," exclaimed Marguerite, as she put her arm around her little confidante. In so doing she felt and heard something stiff crackling in Anne's bosom, whereupon the maid-of-honour drew herself away in evident confusion.

Her mistress at once had her curiosity aroused. "What have you there, child?" she enquired.

"Oh, my Princess, I could not tell you," replied Anne, blushing and for once absolutely disconcerted. "'Tis a secret!" she added.

"A secret from me!—'tis a love letter I believe, ay, surely a paper of some kind, I vow. Have you then no confidence in my discretion?"

"Not a paper but a parchment," replied Anne, "'tis a sort of delicious billet-doux, yet dare I not reveal it," she added mysteriously.

The Princess put forth her hand and laughingly felt the parchment, which crackled again beneath her touch.

"Anne," she said, "most naughty are you and mischievous thus to conceal your secrets from me, who have none from you, yet, if I guess aright from whom your billet-doux will you tell me all about it?"

Anne nodded. "If you guess, my Princess, what need for me to keep the secret?"

"Which in any case, wicked Anne, are you burning to divulge. Is not your 'sort of a delicious billet-doux' perchance from King Henry the huge, the handsome, and the hard to hinder?"

The maid-of-honour clapped her hands, and without more ado whipped out from the folds of her corsage an immense scroll inscribed with the Royal Arms of England, at which Marguerite stared in astonishment.

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"I'll read it to you, Princess," she exclaimed, "for 'tis writ in a good, Royal, classic English which even to me seemeth somewhat unusual." And she laughed heartily while commencing :

"'To our most loyal subject, but disobedient and tantalising Puss.' (Ay, in sooth, I'll tantalise His Heaviness ! she remarked as an aside.) 'Learn by these presents'—there are as yet no presents, alack, Madame ! 'that we being desirous to converse with you in private on weighty matters, having partly to do with our intention of ourselves bestowing upon you the ancient and honourable Order of the Garter——'"

Anne could proceed no further in her reading, for at that moment King Henry himself, accompanied by several nobles, was seen approaching from Guines, being on his way to sup with the Very Christian King. As her maid-of-honour was hurriedly hiding away her huge love letter, Marguerite remarked with a smile, "The motto of the Order of the Garter, Anne, is *Honi soit qui mal y pense*, yet not now will I leave you to be invested with that dignity by His Grace of England. See when he joins us, therefore, that, should he dismount, you remain not alone with him, as so long this afternoon."

Anne looked at her mistress quizzingly.

"Did Madame then find the time so long—alone?" Her meaning was so plain that the Princess considered any reply unnecessary. Truly, there were moments when Anne Boleyn became embarrassing—"she is growing up too fast," thought Marguerite.

King Henry, the huge, the handsome and the hard to hinder duly descended from his horse and on foot accompanied the ladies back to their camp, but Anne, mindful of the admonition of her mistress, was upon her good behaviour, the King therefore had no further opportunity given to him for entertaining her upon the subject of garters, honourable or otherwise.

CHAPTER XXI

FOR BAYARD AND FOR FRANCE

THE events and the solemnly signed treaties of the Field of the Cloth of Gold had long become things of the past, and while, the treaties being torn up, Henry had become the ally of the Emperor Charles, Bayard and Fleurange were defending the dilapidated walls of the city of Mézières in the north-eastern part of France.

Standing on the shattered battlements with his squire L'Allègre, whose head was bound with a bloody cloth, the Chevalier was surveying the scene. While not very far from the walls the view was broken by an immense oak tree, of great age with wide spreading branches, further away, to the right and left of the river Meuse, stretched the camps of the enemy. The camp of that celebrated free-lance Franz von Seckingen was on the right bank, with him being the famous young knight, Ulrich von Hutten, one whose body was frail but courage indomitable. Famous for his duels and love affairs, as skilful with the sword and pen as Bayard with the lance, had not Hutten dared to write a brilliant treatise in support of Luther? With this witty and amusing satire upon the Church, he had not been afraid to proceed to Rome, where he had boldly dedicated it to Leo X.—the Pope who loved a joke the more so that it were at the expense of his Cardinals.

While the powerful Seckingen had subsequently given his protection to the poetical knight, with the

result that the twain were now banded together against France, François had but his own meanness to thank that he had alienated von Seckingen. He was a mere country gentleman, who yet maintained an army with an excellent artillery, one who from his habit of, sword in hand, avenging the wrongs of others, had been nick-named The National Justiciary of Germany. Charles V. had been glad to pay the warlike Seckingen well for his services, and had opened the war by sending him first to ravage the territories of La Marck.

Upon the other side of the river Meuse lay the camp of the Count of Nassau. This Henry of Nassau—Dillenburg, Lord of Breda, who by his marriage with the heiress of Orange-Châlons was to become the ancestor of so many celebrated Princes and Kings, was, like Seckingen, a noted soldier, and, like him also, not above receiving the wages of the Emperor for the services of his mercenary troops.

The Imperial forces having united under these two great commanders, had, after marching through the territories of the Wild Boar of the Ardennes, invaded France, and before the unprepared Very Christian King had become well alive to the fact how utterly he had been befooled by Cardinal Wolsey, he had lost half a dozen of his northern cities. When finally Mézières, the important key of Champagne, had been invested, François would have been without means of protecting it had it not been that Bayard had volunteered to go to the defence of the beleaguered city, which was already in a deplorable condition when, with his friend Fleurance, he threw himself within its walls,

As the Chevalier, who had recently returned from a sortie, turned to his squire, he enquired : " How feels your head now, L'Allègre ? " who replied :

" The wound feels nothing, my Seigneur, since that brown-skinned Swiss trumpeter the Seigneur

de Fleurange lately gave us bound it up. 'Tis a likely lad, and right clever with the trumpet calls, yet is it pity he for ever talks Italian in preference to French—which yet he understands likewise.”

“That matters little, L’Allègre, so he do well his duty, and Fleurange told me he came from the border country of Ticino. Fleurange hath his brother for trumpeter, and yon holy nun, whom yonder we see tending the wounded, is, he says, the aunt of both the boys.”

“Ay, my Seigneur, yet to speak once more of this crack I had on the skull. Had it not been that you fought with the gallantry of a lion, and rescued me when they had me down, then surely I was a dead man. 'Twas a shrewd blow you dealt to Seckingen, 'tis pity you finished him not.”

“Franz von Seckingen is a right gentle knight, yet tough as steel; 'twas a pretty bit of sword play we had together, and I did but split his helm. Yet may we finish the match another day—this time he hath retired in good order upon the supports of Nassau. And yet methinks, L’Allègre, Fleurange pushes him hard and, since Hutten’s men are giving way before him, may haply spike the guns of yon plaguey battery before increasing numbers drive him back again, as alas! is ever the case with us.”

“Ay, my master, they are indeed far too many for our small garrison; our men know it only too well, and, may I speak freely, Seigneur?”

“Speak on, L’Allègre, never yet did Bayard fear the truth, even if disagreeable.”

“Well, my Seigneur, the officers and men are alike discontented and may not be relied on. Early this morning a large party deserted, escaping over the broken walls in the rear of the town.”

“Pish! Let such cravens go! not worthy are they to share our glory!”

“Yet, Sir, do the remainder grumble; some

say that already on the day when you vanquished and wounded the Constable de Bourbon that war was certain—that King François should have known it and got him ready for the fray. Yet since, by his improvidence, he got naught prepared—even when hearing how His Grace of England had gone to meet the Emperor at Gravelines—then say they, mutinously, were you to blame.”

“In what way, friend?”

“They call you crazy, Sir, to volunteer to defend this wretched place, say ’twas unfair moreover to bring them, few in number, with you, to face such overwhelming odds. They grumble further in that you spared the Constable when you had him at your mercy. Had you but cut his traitorous throat, they say, then had he not now deserted France to join her enemies—lend them all his warlike skill against us.”

“L’Allègre, they are misguided, and I will speak to them, shew them that if the place were hard to hold then was there the greater reason we should defend it while the King of France, who truly was to blame for over confidence, seeing I warned him, was collecting his army. And had I not come hither with greatest expedition, then surely could His Grace of England have been here before us—marched here from Calais, taken Mézières in rear.”

“And, as our men say, my Seigneur, will he do even yet. Thus shall we have three armies to fight in place of two, as now.”

“Nay, there the men are wrong, in rear we are safe, our communications open. I have tidings of the English beef-eating King, he is away to the north. Would indeed that it were not so, for, were he but nearer, I would attempt to seize his person, by a *coup de main* by night. Ay, and you should ride with me, L’Allègre! ’Tis by some such deed I’d have you win those knightly spurs

that are your meed already, since for no mean action would I dub you knight."

"What a man is my master! a lion for bravery! yet others, alas! have not such hearts of steel."

There was now silence for a minute, and then the squire, pointing over the plain, remarked once more.

"The tide hath turned, my Seigneur, our men are rolling back to the gates in haste, and one they carry with them; meanwhile the rearguard covers the retreat. See you! 'tis surely the Seigneur de Fleurange!"

"Ay L'Allègre, 'tis he sure enough, for behold the trumpeter beside the litter bears his sword and helmet. Let us to the gates that there be no delay. I trust he be yet alive!"

Running down from the ramparts, the Chevalier and his squire were ready to meet the litter upon which the wounded man was being brought in. A nun whose thick veil had two eyelet holes cut in it, had already run to its side and was leaning over, endeavouring to staunch a place from which the blood was gushing out.

"Stay not the litter," exclaimed Bayard, "but bear it straight to his tent." For the bearers, out of respect to their commander, had halted at his approach. "Fleurange, my Comrade, are you wounded sore?"

"Nay, halt a minute and take your breath, men, ere ascending the slope," commanded Fleurange. Then he said cheerfully, in reply to the Chevalier. "I have spiked the guns, Comrade, as you desired, nor need you fear for me, 'tis nothing. A mere slash on the wrist, which severed the gauntlet yet did not much damage, and an arquebus ball through the flesh of the thigh. Save for that had I walked to my tent."

"Thanks be to the Holy Mother, 'tis no worse, dear Comrade—how then went it in the fight?"

"We did splendidly at first, Bayard—drove Seckingen and Hutten right back through the advance battery and, after spiking six guns, followed them until we came upon Nassau's men—and then matters changed, although we drove them also back to start with."

"'Tis glorious news, Fleurange, that you destroyed the battery, yet how chanced it after Nassau began to give way?"

"He threw more supports across the river, when my men, seeing their numbers, lost heart. 'Twas in holding them together that I received these scratches. Yet the rearguard, under De Lorges, hath shewn courage and skill, thus have we not lost many—you should speak well of De Lorges, Bayard."

"Ay, Comrade, I will mention him to the King—he is a good officer."

"'Tis the Seigneur de Fleurange himself that you should mention, Sir," here piped in the little round-faced trumpeter that was carrying the wounded man's helmet and sword.

"Why, what know ye of the matter, boy?" demanded the Chevalier, smiling and looking curiously at the lad, who was brown as a berry.

"I know, Sir, I saw it all, though he would have me stop in the rear. The Seigneur de Fleurange was shouting 'La Marck! La Marck!' as one demented, and spitting the enemy in all directions like woodcocks on toast. Examine this bloody sword, Sir! 'tis scarce fit for a trumpeter to carry, lest he soil the notes of his instrument and cover the mouthpiece with gore!"

The lad positively shuddered as he handed Fleurange's weapon to Pierre de Terrail, who observed that even the hilt was covered with blood and brains.

While Fleurange laughed, and reproved his trumpeter for addressing his commander without

being first spoken to, the appearance of the lad interested the Chevalier, who observed :

"Fleurange? That trumpeter! his face and voice are somewhat familiar to me, yet, save that, like his brother, he is somewhat lightly built for this rough bloody work, he resembles him not."

"All these Swiss boys are alike in two things, Comrade," replied Fleurange roughly, "they are too fragile and talk too much! If he mind not his tongue I shall rid me of this youth when I can find another to replace him."

"Then will you do wrong, Comrade, to my mind, for the lad is a good one, and of you speaks the truth. What say you, L'Allègre?"

"There I am with you, my Seigneur. I like the lad right well and will, if his master allow me, take him to dwell with me in my own tent, teach him how to clean armour and rightly become a soldier. He hath a sweet voice and 'tis less Swiss than his brother's. Came he not from the Italian border, I would say I had met him before."

"Nay, nay," exclaimed Fleurange, "you cannot take the lad, L'Allègre, after all he is faithful to me, and I need his services at every turn, moreover he and his brother must stay together with their aunt. Carry me in, my men, this holy nun will accompany me and aid me dress my wounds."

As William de la Marck was now carried into his tent, which was pitched close behind, but back to back with that of Bayard, a swarm of officers and soldiers, all wearing a discontented appearance, thronged around the Chevalier.

"What means this murmuring?" demanded Bayard sternly. "Methinks your bearing is unsoldierlike! Yet, have you a grievance I will hear it, so it be expressed in proper manner. Who is your spokesman? let him advance and speak for all. Fall back the others in line. Officers! see your men form their ranks!"

As the men fell back abashed into a semblance of order, an officer stepped forward and, respectfully saluting, said :

"Sir, we would point out to you that the time hath come to evacuate this town of Mézières, which is no longer tenable. We are not mutinous, Sir, yet feel we that we have done our utmost. We have not shirked our duty but now would beg you to retire, ere all our throats be cut for none effect. Sir, this we think, if we, with but half his experience of war, can see the case, then Bayard surely must recognise the situation. Moreover, Sir, our food is over scant, while of pay have we received none from the King; thus can we not purchase any from those of the country, who have store of victuals concealed yet will not share it with those who defend their lives."

As the officer ceased talking, all of those behind him made exclamations of approbation of his words. Bayard held up his hand, and, when the muttering had ceased, addressed the discontented soldiers, who indeed had much on their side.

"My Comrades all—you speak of your pay last—yet will I answer first on that matter. All that I have is at your disposal. Since, as you rightly say, the King hath sent us none, I have been saving a reserve against the time that you might require it. L'Allègre, go, I beg you, with the trumpeter to my tent, and bring hither the sack of coins you know of."

The faces of the men brightened at once, and presently when the money was brought, Bayard continued: "My Comrades, there will here be found maybe three, maybe four days' pay a man according to rank, and freely I give it. To the officers I look that just division be made."

The men were beginning to shout "Long live our noble leader!" when Pierre de Terrail silenced them. "Nay, nay, applaud me not, my Comrades—

'tis nothing ! I would that it were more, but neither has Bayard received any pay ! Now would I have you listen to my reply to that which, by your leader, you have said.

“Comrades ! you advance that no longer can we defend ourselves, yet will I prove you mistaken. Suppose that we were in an open field, with but a four-foot wide ditch in front of us. Even there could we fight for a whole day without being defeated. God be thanked ! here have we walls and ramparts, and believe Bayard, when he tells you that, before our enemies set one foot upon them, we will fill up this ditch which is before the walls with their corpses !”

As their gallant commander ceased this spirited address, all his hearers, inspired by his courage, applauded loudly, while shouting “Bayard is right ! we will fight to the end ! God save our noble leader !” Their enthusiasm was unbounded. Delighted at the spirit which he had aroused, Bayard addressed them once more.

“Brave men ! you are worthy of France, and that end you speak of may come sooner than you think, and we remain here the undisputed masters. For I have a plan to hasten matters. Go now, divide your money and refresh yourselves, and, having so done, seek me some peasant within the town willing to traverse the enemy’s lines. I would send a letter to the city of Sedan, to that warlike Prince the Duc de Bouillon, father of the Seigneur de Fleurange. He hath of late been discontented with the King of France, in that he supported him not when our enemies yonder wrested from him the Duchy of Luxembourg—yet was the King helpless in the matter, and we will ere long retake Luxembourg for him. Now, however, hath he great cause to hate Seckingen—his former friend—therefore will he surely give me the aid I seek, can I but reach him. See you therefore to it, find me a man or boy to carry my news—the distance is nothing.”

The men, more than ever relying on their leader, declared that if there were a peasant in the town willing to carry the message he should be brought, even had they themselves to subscribe to pay him from the money they had just received.

"Nay, nay," exclaimed Bayard, touched at seeing that his soldiers were imbued with his own generous spirit. "That sacrifice is not necessary, Bayard hath no money left, 'tis true, yet hath he here a ring. 'Twas given him by the King of Hungary for some slight service, and is of value. Yet it is now of value to its owner but for what it may do for France in her need. This ring shall be the peasant's guerdon, to be delivered to him ere he leave these walls, thus may he deposit it in some safe place among his friends. Now leave me, Comrades, see that you bring me some bold varlet later; I must prepare my mission."

While the soldiers departed, Bayard called his squire. "L'Allègre," he said, "I am in some puzzlement. My writing, you know! 'tis most large and scarce fitted for an epistle which must needs be somewhat lengthy. Nor, I fear me, can you do much better?"

"Nay indeed, my Seigneur, when I have writ Armand de L'Allègre my writing's ended—yet is there the trumpeter, might not he help us? Mayhap the priests have taught him somewhat—his aunt is a nun! surely should he know writing."

Bayard laughed at his worthy squire's reasoning. "Fetch me here the lad," quoth he—"we can but try him."

When the trumpeter was brought, the Seigneur enquired, speaking in Italian, "Know you aught of writing, boy?"

"My Lord," replied the youth in the same tongue, "I was instructed by the good fathers of St Gudule in Geneva in that art. I have from childhood been

employed by them in the transcribing of the Holy Scriptures in Italian, French and German."

"Good! most good! would I had been likewise trained in such profitable employment! Yet is writing scarce a knightly occupation, thus in Savoy I little practised it. Now take you inkhorn, pen and paper—the box of sand as well, 'tis yonder, I would have you write for me, Trumpeter—you heard my words without?"

"Ay, my Lord, and I am ready. In what language would you have your letter?"

"It must be in French, and see you write with care, great things depend upon this letter. Yet would I have you know, lest, being brought up in godly guise, your tender conscience shrink from setting down that which seems not true, that this is a ruse of war which I would practise. Ay, lad, a ruse by which the lives of all within this city may be saved, the honour of all maids and matrons safeguarded from yonder German cut-throat gangs, to whom nor age nor sex is sacred. And by all ancient custom, and likewise sanctioned by our Mother Church, such ruses are permitted, nor deemed as falsehood."

The trumpeter, a tall gipsy-like youth with a shock head of black hair yet a pleasing countenance, smiled at this explanation being deemed necessary, and answered,

"My Lord, my conscience is clear on such matters, for have not the monks of St Gudule instructed me concerning the wars waged by our Holy Fathers the Popes of Rome, from early times, against the Kings of Lombardy, the Dukes of Beneventum and of Spoleto? Ay, likewise against the Saracen hordes that long time in the ninth century ravaged the Roman State, from behind their ramparts in their great fortress between Gaeta and Garigliano. In those wars, my Lord, the Holy Fathers, the bold John VIII., his successors, Marinus and Hadrian III.,

above all, that warlike Pope Sergius, he whose son by the fair Marozia, Theophylact's daughter, became Pope John XI., employed ruse most freely. So that the Papal cause prevailed, all schemes the Holy Fathers deemed not only fair but laudable."

Bayard stared at the youth. "A very mine of learning!" he exclaimed, "never yet heard I all this history, yet have I fought at Garigliano myself."

"Ay, my Lord, men have heard of your great deeds there—for long must it live in history what Bayard did all single-handed at the Bridge of the river Garigliano."

"'Twas a good fight, Trumpeter, yet said men more of it than it deserved," replied Bayard modestly—"nor was any ruse required there. Yet am I glad that you should quote to me the example of the Popes who fought at Garigliano so long before our day, thus can our consciences be clear indeed in that which we now purpose."

"My Lord," replied the trumpeter—"to me such example is scarce needed when Bayard dictates, since all men know Bayard can do no wrong."

"Tush! lad, leave Bayard alone—'tis not fit you name him in the same breath with the Holy Fathers concerning whom you seem thus well instructed. Yet, when we have more leisure than at this hour, gladly would I hear of the warlike deeds of John VIII. and Sergius—mayhap even could we spare a few minutes now. Were the Saracens very numerous, lad? moreover had the Dukes of Beneventum and Spoleto then great power? How armed they their troops in that same ninth century? wore they then coats of mail?"

The trumpeter could scarce prevent himself from laughing outright, on perceiving how Bayard's love of military history was making him entirely oblivious of the matter in hand.

"Sir," he replied, "The Duke Guy of Spoleto destroyed the Saracens near Gaeta in the year of Our

Lord 890 and was in consequence consecrated Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire in the following year by Pope Stephen V. Of the Duke Berengarius of Beneventum, who was Guy's rival, and who likewise became Emperor, I could likewise relate to you many great martial exploits, yet would they be long—and, my Lord, 'twere haply better first to write the letter."

Bayard sighed, then laughed at his feeling of disappointment.

"Ay, my lad! you have sense indeed! Spoleto, Beneventum and the Saracens can wait—not so my missive! I pray you therefore take up your pen and take down my words. Now write as follows"—and he commenced to dictate.

"From the Captain Bayard to His Highness, Robert de la Marck, Duc de Bouillon, Prince of Sedan—at Sedan.

"YOUR HIGHNESS,

"We are besieged on two sides at Mézières, yet, by God's good grace, all is well with us. Now 'tis more than three months since you informed me that, despite his seeming enmity to France, the Count of Nassau waits but a word from you to join us, he being your relative. That matter of the increase of subsidy from the King of France is now arranged according to his desires, a special messenger being just to hand from the Very Christian King hath confirmed the matter. The said Count being a gallant gentleman and gentle knight, I beg you warn him now not to hesitate a moment more, but raise his camp at once before this place and march to Sedan, for here he is in imminent danger. I have notice that 12,000 Swiss pikemen, veteran troops, with 800 men-at-arms at four to a lance, making 3200 mounted men, will this night reinforce me. They will camp at but three leagues from this place, and to-morrow will we together cut him in pieces

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first, then fall on Seckingen. Yet save Nassau if you can for France, to whom he is inclined. When he hath joined you, march you with him to take Seckingen and Hutten on the one side while we attack him on the other. Thus shall not a man of them escape! See you keep this matter secret that Seckingen learn not that Nassau is our man."

"That is all, my good lad," exclaimed the Chevalier as he finished dictating, "now will I sign." Taking the pen from the trumpeter, he affixed his name, Bayard, in a large bold hand at the foot of the sheet.

"Now Trumpeter," he added with a cunning smile, "so but we get our peasant, the trick is done! the siege of Mézières to-morrow will be raised. Seal the letter with this seal."

The trumpeter sealed the letter with Bayard's large seal engraved with his coat-of-arms, but looked puzzled as he rose from the table. "My Lord," he enquired timidly, "I fail to follow you. How can this letter reach La Marck in Sedan in time? To arrive at that place, the messenger by whom you would send it must, of necessity, traverse the lines of Franz von Seckingen, by whom will he, of a surety, be taken."

Bayard laughed to see the lad so naïve. "My boy, hath Bayard then deceived one with all your monkish learning? How much more then will he deceive that mutton-headed Seckingen, who knows naught save to deliver good hard blows, in which, I will confess, he is a very adept."

Seeing that Bayard continued to chuckle as at an inward joke, the trumpeter spoke almost pettishly.

"My Lord, mayhap that I may myself be mutton-headed, since I see it not!"

"My good lad," replied his commander—"the letter which you so well have written is not intended

to reach La Marck—it is for Seckingen. See you not that, reading it, he will be furious with Nassau for deceiving him—they will fight each other, then will we fall upon them both in the confusion.”

The boy now laughed too. “What a clever brain,” he exclaimed “hath devised this ruse!” Then ceasing to smile, he added thoughtfully: “But the poor peasant! if caught, he will be hanged!”

“’Tis probable, yet will he give his life for his country and save thousands—yet so he can run fast he may escape, it is a chance.”

“And if he go not, you, my Lord, will die!”

“We all may die, Trumpeter, save the sick and wounded, whom this evening will I despatch to the rear with an escort. You will I send with them to the King, by whom, doubtless, or rather by the learned lady, his sister, the Duchesse d’Alençon, your clerkly knowledge will be most highly prized.”

“Yet Sir, is not the Princess Marguerite but lately gone to Alençon? they say in the camp that some time since she left the King for some matter which displeased her greatly. The name of the Admiral of France was mentioned.”

“Boy, listen not to gossip of the camp! Yet if she be gone, still shall you follow her, for, ere the end may come, I would send a letter to that gracious lady—and you must write it for me presently.”

“My Lord,” exclaimed the trumpeter, “the letter will I gladly write, yet must you find another messenger. I will not leave you!”

“Trumpeter, you must obey orders!—yet see who enters?—oh ’tis my worthy squire. What now, L’Allègre?”

“My Seigneur, the Sieur Du Bellay, the officer that was the spokesman for the others, would have speech with you—shall I admit him?”

“Ay, bid him enter, and at once, for I await him with impatience.

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"Well, Comrade?" asked the Chevalier enquiringly, as Du Bellay was ushered in, "have you found him for me?"

"Most noble Chevalier," answered Du Bellay, who looked most crestfallen, "I myself and, under my orders, the other officers, and parties of men with them, have been searching the whole town, high and low. Alas! that I should have to say it, not one of the inhabitants of this beggarly place, for which we have been shedding our blood so freely, will take your letter. Nay, Seigneur, not one, either gentle or simple, for, finding that those of the baser sort would not go, we tried to persuade some of the better class, who will have more to lose should the town fall. Rather than go to certain death, said one and all, would they wait and face the tender mercies of the German *lansquenets*."

"I thank you, Comrade," replied Bayard gently, "I thank you and the others, for all have done their best. Should the unpatriotic inhabitants of Mézières then suffer, as suffer well they may, the horrors of a sack, but themselves will they have to thank for it. You may retire, Sieur Du Bellay!"

"Yet before retiring, Sir," answered the officer, "I should be failing in my duty did I not tell you that which all the garrison, whether of your men or those of the Seigneur de Fleurange, would have me say. It is that this night you should evacuate this wretched town, leave the cowardly inhabitants to the fate which they have courted, while marching off ourselves with our wounded to defend some other city, where men are brave, and which may be in danger when Mézières falls. Thus shall we not lose our lives for naught, for yet may we live to be of use to France!"

"I have heard you," replied the Chevalier coldly, "and would have you know that it is not so that Bayard understands his duty. Yet later in the day you shall have your answer. Then will we see how

many are there who will elect, of their own free will, to stand by their commander to the last. You may retire now, Du Bellay." Stiffly the Chevalier bowed the officer out—he retired, followed by L'Allègre.

"My plan has come to naught, Trumpeter," exclaimed Bayard sadly. "Well, God's will be done!—we can destroy the letter."

"Not so, my Lord, keep it awhile; for matters may yet be arranged. By your leave, Sir, I would step without a moment, I beg you preserve the missive until my return."

The trumpeter left the tent, but, returning in a few minutes, he said: "My Lord, a messenger can be found, one willing to risk his life for Bayard and for France."

Bayard started forward eagerly. "What mean you, lad? where can such be found?"

"My Lord, I gave that officer your Lordship's orders that he procure, and bring forthwith, the clothing of a peasant boy to the tent which I share with my aunt the nun and my young brother the trumpeter of the Seigneur de Fleurange. I will carry the letter myself, my lord, ay, and will guarantee that it falls into the hands of Franz von Seckingen."

"You, my brave boy! Nay I cannot allow you to run the risk—too young are you for such a danger!"

"Not too young to be inspired by the deeds of my noble commander! My Lord, since one must carry the letter, what more the risk to me than to another? What more the life of a Swiss farmer's son than that of a peasant of Mézières? My Lord, think of what hangs upon this crisis! I pray you allow me take the letter!"

"Most noble youth! Yet, should you fall in this most worthy mission, have you a father or a mother, to whom I could bear the tidings of your glorious self-sacrifice?"

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"'Tis enough to inform the holy nun who watches now by the side of the *Sieur de Fleurange*—I have no father. Give me now the letter, my lord, that I may retire to disguise myself. When ready I will call *L'Allègre*. I beg you give him orders to pass me without the gates. Yet here must I not return, nor, until I am well away, should others know, for none should watch me leave the walls, since spies there may be, within and without, to foil my purpose with bullet or with bolt from arbalest."

"You think of all things, most noble youth, as though you were an old commander! where learned you this wisdom? Alas, I grieve to see you risk to lose it and your life together. Thus most reluctant I give the letter to your charge—yet 'tis for France, and, should you win safely back, the King of France shall not let you go unrewarded."

"So that Bayard remember his trumpeter, whether he live or die, 'twill be more to me, my Lord, than praise of any King!"

"Brave boy, I will! I will! my blessing go with you. If you but return, you ne'er shall need a father! Embrace me, good lad!"

As Bayard embraced the boy, his own eyes were moist with emotion, but the trumpeter turned his face aside a moment.

A moment later he stood in the door of the tent, with his back to the light, so that the Chevalier might not be able to observe whether or no he were moved in that fateful moment of parting.

"Farewell! my lord," he exclaimed. "'Tis for Bayard and for France!"

CHAPTER XXII

A RUSE—AND ITS REWARD

SCARCELY half an hour had elapsed from the time of the trumpeter's departure with his commander's missive, when the greatest commotion was observed in Seckingen's camp. Summoned to the ramparts, Bayard stood with a group of officers observing the scene, which created the greatest astonishment in the minds of the garrison of Mézières, who were not in the secret. For, while drums were sounding and bugles blowing, the tents of the Imperial forces were being struck. At the same time, the men of Seckingen's and Hutten's forces could be seen, on the right bank of the Meuse, shaking their fists at those across the river, while, even at that distance, so loud were their hoarse shouts of rage, that their guttural exclamations could be heard.

Meanwhile, upon Nassau's side of the river, his men could be seen assembled in astonishment upon the bank. It was evident that they must believe that the whole of their allies had suddenly become demented.

Bayard watched the scene in glee. "It works! it works!" he exclaimed, and, the time having now come when he could do so, he briefly explained to the assembled officers the stratagem of war which he had put in practice.

While the officers likewise shook their sides with laughter, L'Allègre observed. "See, my Seigneur, now is Nassau sending men across the nearer bridge,

to discover the meaning of the turmoil. Ah! their allies are firing upon them, some fall. Now is the fat in the fire indeed!"

"And," exclaimed Du Bellay, "some of the men of Nassau are now vainly trying to form their ranks, while others are wildly lowering their tents, in order to obtain room to resist the attack of their allies; was ever seen such commotion? Oh, Seigneur, your ruse hath indeed been crowned with splendid success, your brain hath saved us all and this city as well! According to your orders, Sir, our men have formed their ranks—they wait within the gates!"

"Better and better!" remarked Bayard. "Now Seckingen opens with his artillery, while, under the cover of the fire of his guns, his footmen swarm across the bridges. Not for ten years of my life would I have missed this scene! See, while they fly to their horses, Nassau's men are shot down everywhere! Dog eats dog in all directions, as they return the fire. Oh! 'tis ludicrous, ludicrous! and meanwhile in this scene of furious turmoil, not one can know the reason that thus sets fast friends at sudden variance."

"Yet now, Comrades," added the Chevalier, "hath come the time when we in turn must eat them both. Now that Nassau hath forced the further bridge, behold! in struggling masses, fighting hand to hand, large parties surge towards our right, while others madly are slaughtering each other across the river. The working parties now, according to the order given, most swiftly wheel all the guns to this side of our shattered battlements, where embrasures exist no longer. Thus can we presently salute yon seething mass of fools with every cannon in one roaring salvo. Right merrily will we wish them good morrow, lest, in their personal concerns, they quite forget that we in Mézières live. After the salvo, upon my order from these ramparts given,

rush from the gates, as furious winds loosed from the Poles before the time in autumn. As blast of Boreas laying low the ripening grain, destroy them! Leave arquebus and arbalest behind—with sword, and spear and dagger thrust, mow them to the ground—nor leave one standing! To your men, my Comrades! Now for the salvo! Gunners, are you ready?”

With wild shouts of exultation and defiance, the officers dashed off to join their troops, and a moment later, with a furious detonation, the whole of the guns of Mézières fired together shook the earth with one terrific roar, the carnage among the contending foes without being terrible.

Immediately afterwards the Chevalier gave the order for which the officers were waiting, and then from the gates they burst forth like devils incarnate, falling like fiends upon the masses of the enemy on the right bank which, as Nassau was now gaining the upper hand, were gradually surging away farther and farther to the right.

Meanwhile the large oak tree, of which mention has been already made, stood in a spot before the walls in which no fighting was going on, and L'Allègre who was observing it, suddenly exclaimed in an excited tone,

“My Seigneur, see you that something unusual transpires by yon oak? A small party approaches it and, unless my sight be faulty, which never was so yet, they trail a rope behind them! Will they hang some one, think you, from yon long straight limb? Ay, now they halt beneath the tree!”

“By heaven! L'Allègre,” exclaimed the Chevalier, “I perceive a figure in brown clothing in the midst of the soldiers. It is—it must be—my brave trumpeter that they would hang! even now they essay to throw up the cord. Gunners! Comrades! follow me! Alas! I fear we lack the time to save him! yet shall we be in time for bitter vengeance.”

Dashing down from the ramparts and out through the now open gateway, Bayard and his followers rushed across the plain. They were but lightly armed, and could therefore make good speed, yet the distance seemed long and their feet to drag like lead as they saw a rope, with a noose at the end, thrown, after several attempts, over the lofty bough.

Distinctly now could the would-be rescuers perceive a slim figure being held up by a couple of Seckingen's men. The trumpeter seemed inert and to be making no efforts to escape. To this he doubtless owed the fact that, as the noose slipped back again over the branch and fell to the ground, the two soldiers holding him set him on his feet, while they watched the new efforts of their comrades to throw the rope across the branch.

They were evidently careless, thinking their victim intended to make no attempt to save his life, for suddenly, making a dive under the arm of one of the Germans, the trumpeter broke clear and started to run in the direction of the gates of Mézières.

With wild and savage shouts the *lansquenets* pursued, but they wore heavy armour and were easily outdistanced. Perceiving this, and the speedy advance of the relieving force, they halted while two of them, the matches of whose arquebuses were burning, took deliberate aim at the flying boy, and fired. He threw up his arms and fell! Then, contented with their bloody work all of the Germans took to their heels.

"Pursue! pursue! cut them down, Comrades, and spare not!" shouted Bayard, and, as an exciting race for life begun on the part of the Germans, he himself rushed up to the prostrate form of his disguised trumpeter, whom he found alive and already sitting up, although the blood was streaming from his ankle.

"Thank God! those fellows have not killed you,

brave lad ! are you wounded sore ? ” said Pierre de Terrail, while stooping tenderly to raise the youth in his strong arms. The boy looked up from under his close-fitting peasant’s cap, so unlike the helmet he had hitherto worn, and, even in that moment of excitement, it struck Bayard that there was something familiar about the eyes in that gipsy face. Yet thought he no more of it when the trumpeter replied,

“ My Lord, my hurt is naught, so that I have done well for Bayard ! ”

“ Ay verily, and for France as well, most courageous boy ! can you now hobble along, think you, so I support you ? Place your arm around my neck. ”

Almost carrying the trumpeter, the Chevalier had nearly reached the drawbridge over the ditch when, exclaiming “ I can no more, ” the boy lost consciousness.

At this moment the nun and Fleurange’s trumpeter rushed out from the gateway—both were wringing their hands. Others also arrived, crowding round.

“ Stand back there, all ! give air ! ” commanded Bayard, and bodily lifted the lad. “ I will carry him to my tent, ” continued the Chevalier, “ make way ! close not round ! see you not that he is faint—yet is not the wound, methinks, serious. Only must the good nun come with me, all others may retire. ”

Bayard had a double reason for telling all to keep back, for, as he held the trumpeter in his arms, it seemed to him almost as if he felt the swelling form of a woman’s bosom. The next moment he thought that he must be mistaken—but well, strange things happened in war, and if it were indeed some woman who, on account of trouble at home, had thus disguised herself, of a surety, thought he, none through him should know her secret. Bearing the inanimate form, and accompanied by the nun alone, the Chevalier entered his tent—where he laid the boy on the bed,

Without being bidden, the nun closed the door. Yet, although Pierre de Terrail had so recently said that the boy wanted air, he now raised no objection. Moreover, was there not, for that matter, a sufficiency of both light and air percolating through the thick canvas of the large square tent?

Bayard felt unaccountably moved as, after having deposited his burden upon his camp bed, he removed the boy's shoe from his bare foot and rolled up the loose peasant's breeches, to discover the wound of which the bleeding had already diminished. He turned to the nun.

"What a slender ancle and calf! and how white! see the foot likewise! Sister, 'tis surely that of a woman!" he exclaimed, in almost awe-struck tones. "Ay, some woman, who would mayhap have died for France, perchance in expiation of some great offence. Yet surely now hath she won her salvation. We must between us keep this secret, yonder is water—bathe you her face while I tend the wound; the bullet, thank God, hath passed through, nor hath it touched the bone."

The nun, whose sobs could be plainly heard beneath her veil, did as she was ordered without uttering a word in reply. Yet was she trembling so that the Chevalier, perceiving it, thought that she would fall.

"Sister!" exclaimed Bayard kindly, "take not on so, rather should you thank the blessed Saints that you be here to aid a woman in distress, ay, one more noble even than the blessed Joan of Arc, or Jeanne la Hachette, that other warlike maid who did such great deeds for France! Yet who can this maid be—or is she wife? or is she neither maid nor wife? Ha, she sighs—she will soon recover from her swoon—watch her tenderly, while I now fetch bandages from my squire's tent, for none save us twain must enter." So saying, Bayard went out, carefully closing the door behind him. Without he

found the young trumpeter of Fleurange, weeping like a girl, but, bidding the boy be comforted, he passed on.

Almost as Pierre de Terrail left the tent, the trumpeter, in whom the Chevalier had rightly recognised a woman, sighed again deeply, then, opening her eyes, enquired languidly :

“Where am I? and who are you who stand by me clothed in black?”

Throwing back the long heavy veil which concealed her features, Françoise de Châteaubriand stood revealed.

In a moment she was on her knees by the side of the camp bed.

“Oh, Princess! oh! my dear Marguerite, we thought you dead! almost we saw you hanged—you, the King’s sister! ’Twas awful! I almost lost my senses and likewise poor Anne. You told us not, or you had not gone; yet what wonderful deeds!—and you, after the Queen, the first Princess in France!”

“It was for Bayard’s sake! for love of him, to save whose life not hell itself had stayed me! Yet tell me, Françoise, hath he discovered me? even as I lost my senses, feeling his dear arm pressed close around my form, a look came in his eyes—and then I knew no more?”

“He knows you are a woman—yet know none beside him. But can I not tell if he suspects whom you really be—Bayard is deep—to my mind he dissembles. Yet that shock head of hair, so black and long, might well deceive your mother. He hath gone for a bandage, himself will doubtless bind your wound. In a moment he will return.”

Marguerite’s eye brightened. “Tear off my wig, dear Françoise; I would have him doubt no longer. Yet oh! what clothes for him to find me in!” She smiled, yet with a touch of vexation—then added with pride: “Had I but been clad, in martial guise, as his trumpeter, the dress were more becoming!”

"Mind not your attire, dear Marguerite, for have you not done for him what never yet hath woman done for man. There! the black wig now hath gone, and your own brown tresses, if somewhat short, yet are, as ever, beautiful—would you could see yourself as he will see you."

"Have you then no mirror?"

"Nay, here I can find none—'tis haply the first time Bayard hath had a woman in his tent, yet 'tis not so in the tent of Fleurange!" Françoise laughed. "Shall I fetch a mirror thence, Marguerite?"

"Nay, nay, yet listen, when Bayard returns, leave us at once and keep all away—even Anne must not come nigh me. I would be alone with my hero, if but for one short hour, Françoise."

At this moment Pierre de Terrail entered the tent softly, bearing a rolled-up bandage in his hand. His bed stood on the far side, somewhat in the gloom, and, as the Comtesse purposely stood between him and his patient, he could at first perceive only part of her body and limbs. Françoise, who had once more put down her veil, remained standing, so as to hide the face of the Princess, as she remarked in an assumed voice, for it was the first time Bayard had heard her speak.

"My Brother, your trumpeter, that is indeed a woman, and now sensible, would speak to you alone—nor can I longer stay, one sorely wounded needs my present aid. Yet can you doubtless wind a bandage?"

Bayard flushed. "I have wound a thousand bandages, Sister!"

"Then, Brother, to your charge I leave her, for a little space. Rest in God's keeping!"

"May God go with you, Sister!"

Françoise swept away in her black robes and Bayard, moving over to the bed, found himself face to face with Marguerite!

Ay, and moreover with Marguerite if pale, yet with her sweet face much as he had seen it last, for,

while talking with her, the Comtesse had been diligently endeavouring to remove the stain with which her skin was dyed. Yet had Marguerite closed her eyes, she gave no sign of life other than the slight movement caused by the rise and fall of her bosom beneath her poor peasant's clothing. He gazed in silent astonishment, for, although he had experienced some strange thrill while holding her in his arms, he surely had not expected this marvel. Leaning over her tremblingly, the Chevalier feared that she had again lost consciousness, while inwardly was he exclaiming: "Sweet heaven! those dear features! Even in all these cares of war, 'tis monstrous that never yet I well had marked them! Yet had she followed me hither, faced danger beside me day by day! Oh! how ungrateful must I have seemed indeed in face of such a sacrifice."

While still the Princess moved not, being yet reassured by her breathing, Bayard bethought him of his instant duty to do his utmost for her in her need. Carefully and skilfully therefore, he now bound up the wound, which to his great joy, seemed slighter than he had imagined, the flow of blood having ceased. As he had just taken the last turn of the bandage, and was about to rise from the bed, over which he was leaning, he felt two warm arms thrown round his neck, while a soft voice whispered in his ear.

"Bayard, beloved Bayard, do you still love me as when first I heard you utter my name aloud before the Queen of Beauty's tribunal? Love you me yet, as when, in the grove of gilded trees, you said that no more we twain must meet alone? words that, alas! until this hour have proved too true. You love me, dear, perchance no longer now that I am no Princess—merely your humble trumpeter?"

Bayard was overcome. "My Marguerite, 'twas you who saved me! who saved us all, a god-like action! Surely will God forgive me—how can I say I do aught but love, on this of all days ever I have lived?"

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“ Bayard, for love of you, who pushed me from you, treated me almost with scorn, I followed you, faced all the horrid sights of war, was present in battle daily by your side, lay by your tent door in sun, wind or rain, was ever obedient to your call ! Love you me now as on that first blessed moonlight night, upon the Field of Cloth of Gold at Ardres ? Tell me truly ! I hunger for the truth, yet should you say that so you love me not, then rather this day had I been hanged, indeed, for were I dead my heart had not been broken ! ”

Marguerite sighed deeply—then added softly, “ And yet, methinks, that had I died to-day my soul this minute had been with you. Yet, my Pierre, would I have your answer—love you me now as then you said you did, while deeming but you bared your heart to heaven ? ”

“ May that dear heaven shrive me, sweet Marguerite, even so to-day I love you ! Yet more, far more would I say—speak of your noble deeds——! ”

Marguerite placed her hands upon Bayard's lips. “ Nay, Pierre, say not another word, for all I wished have I now learned. Yet draw me one minute close to your heart, remembering naught save that this day freely my life I offered for your sweet, noble sake. For, truth to tell, of France, or other, thought I scarce at all. It all was Bayard, Bayard ! Bayard first and Bayard last ! Had the rope choked me, the last word it had squeezed from out my dying lips had been your blessed name, my Bayard ! ”

Before such devotion, Pierre de Terrail felt himself so drawn to Marguerite as to form no longer any separate being but a part of her very self. His soul and hers were joined, merged in completest unison. Forgetful of all save Marguerite, he held her close.

In silence he met, and answered with equal force, the noble passion of the woman who had proved that more indeed than life she valued his love. The minutes passed as in a dream—a dream of heaven !

CHAPTER XXIII

THE SACRIFICE OF FRANÇOISE

THE afternoon air was hot and still, Nassau and Seckingen, having drawn off their shattered forces in opposite directions, the sound of battle was no longer heard, and Mézières was free! Not even a trumpet call was ringing in the camp, the troops pursuing the enemy had not yet returned, while those within the walls, wearied out with constant vigils, had fallen asleep. Even the sentinels nodded on their posts—the need for watchfulness no longer existing.

Thus in the silence of that summer's afternoon, for a space the noble lovers enjoyed together the sweetness of life, which had come to them after such a season of trial—of stress and storm. At length, however, they gradually became aware of a murmuring sound, as of someone reading in the tent behind them. At first, wrapped up in their thoughts of each other, neither Bayard nor Marguerite paid any heed but, after a time, as if oblivious of the fact that in the stillness her voice might be overheard, the reader enunciated her words more loudly and distinctly. His attention being thus at length arrested, the tones which he heard seemed to Bayard's ear somehow familiar.

"That voice! Marguerite, who is it that reads to Fleurange?"

"'Tis one faithful to me, beloved, the holy nun who was here a while since."

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"Yet listen to her words, dear Marguerite, she surely reads of love!"

"Ay, my Bayard, let us then hear her reading—for of love is what we surely most would hear!" replied Marguerite, with a smile.

Listening, the lovers could now distinctly follow part of a romantic story from *The Heptameron*, which ran as follows.

"At length, as they wandered in those bosky groves, this beautiful lady, whose heart was thrilled by the trilling of the nightingales, became insensible to all but the glamour of the moment. The soft passion which so long had she virtuously repressed and concealed, overpowered her senses. Forgetful of her marriage vows, the fair Amarilla yielded herself to the arms of the brave knight Sir Roland, saying: 'Henceforth, beloved, am I thine, take me with thee to thy castle of Amandie, which for ever more will we transform into a bower of bliss, where Cupid alone shall be our King.'"

"That tale the nun reads tells not of love alone but of sin!" exclaimed Bayard at length, "of sin and human frailty. It minds me, Marguerite, that I too now am sinning!" With a sigh, he gently disengaged himself from her arms.

She felt a pang of anguish while asking winningly, "Is the sin then so hard, my Pierre?"

"Nay, alas! all too easy, but devil-sent. You, likewise, have a husband, Marguerite, yet in the shock of this great day's events, no single thought that such an one exists hath crossed my brain."

"A husband who is no husband! one from whom the Holy Father can release me by his dispensation. Then will my hand be free, and may you take it, Bayard, our compact hath been sealed in tragic scenes, 'tis now too strong for breaking!"

"Yet, sweet one, tempt me not! the marriage vow is sacred! Marguerite, raise not within my famished soul such phantom dream of earthly bliss. 'Tis but

in heaven we may be made as one. The more we love, the greater is our need to aid each other on that celestial road."

"Beloved Bayard, fear not! nor you nor I would the other lead astray. Such ties of love as ours from heaven are sent, yet can the Pope sanctify them here below. All vows the Holy Father can annul, where marriage only means the husband's life of sin or perchance the wife's deception. Thus, with his benediction, may we henceforward purely join our lives—the heart and hand of each the other's! Are you no Christian, Pierre?" the Princess added pleadingly, "or why then doubt the supreme power of him who holds Saint Peter's blessed keys?"

Marguerite, seeing by his softened expression that Bayard relented before her convincing argument, extended her arms, triumphantly drawing him back to her once more.

With lips close to her ear, he now responded. "Far be it from me, my Marguerite, to question the Papal powers—to do so would be worse than sacrilege. I own them supreme, and, in very sooth, oft-times in the past have the Holy Fathers granted such divorces, by them to sanctify a new and a purer union, such as will be surely ours."

Bayard embraced the Princess reverently, indeed almost as though he already saw her his wife, while uttering these words.

At that moment a trumpet was heard at a distance, sounding a fanfare such as is used when the guard turns out to salute troops arriving, or any officers of distinction. The notes were horribly out of tune, and Marguerite, whose musical ear was perfect, made a laughing grimace.

"Poor little Anne!" she exclaimed, "her English courage is noble enough, and she hath proved it, yet never could I rightly teach her music."

"Anne! What would you say, Marguerite?"

"Ay, none other but Anne Boleyn! is she

not Fleurange's trumpeter? oh, most blind of Bayard's."

The Chevalier had not time to recover from his astonishment ere the trumpet sounded again—this time it was "the alarm," badly out of tune, which was heard being rung out close to the door of Bayard's tent.

As, withdrawing himself from beside the Princess, Bayard approached the door, the flap was cautiously drawn aside, and Fleurange's trumpeter or, to be accurate, Anne Boleyn, trumpet in hand, poked in her head and shoulders through the orifice.

"Seigneur de Bayard," she exclaimed rapidly—"heard you my alarm? I sounded it to give you warning. The Admiral de Bonnivet is within the gates! I bade L'Allègre detain him at any cost while I ran on hither. He would see you, Seigneur."

"Bonnivet! here?"

"Ay, my lord, and approaching—yet must he not recognise my Princess, who I perceive hath quitted her disguise, yet will I aid her, so that he know her not."

Rushing across the tent, in a flash Anne had replaced the black wig upon Marguerite's head and above it, the peasant's cap. A dark coloured military cloak, of light material, belonging to Bayard, was next thrown across her form, while, as a final touch of genius, after quickly rubbing her hands on the earthy floor of the tent, Anne smeared the dirt which she had gathered upon the cheek of the Princess.

"Never can he now recognise you, dear Madame!" exclaimed the maid-of-honour, as she surveyed her work. "Be of good courage," she added. At that moment Anne observed that, in her haste, she had put on the wig with the wrong side before, but, while thinking to herself "'twill but serve to make the disguise the more complete," she wisely said nothing about it.

Her manœuvres had been but the work of a moment and then, after dashing out of the tent again, her discordant fanfare could be heard ringing out once more in honour of the Admiral, who approached while arguing with L'Allègre.

"What is this story that you would tell me, Squire, about the trumpeter boy that, disguised as a peasant, performed such wonders, being within and sorely wounded? That is no reason surely that I should not see your commander! Nor can I stay here longer in this accursed sun, after having been scorched by it all day. I tell you, I will enter and see the Seigneur de Bayard, I come to him from the King."

Rudely pushing past L'Allègre, Bonnivet insolently threw back the flap of the door and entered all unbidden.

Once within, he found himself confronted by Pierre de Terrail, who stood so as partly to conceal Marguerite, where she lay upon the bed.

Haughtily the Chevalier accosted the unwelcome intruder.

"What would you here, Monsieur de Bonnivet? Come you with an armed force to relieve Mézières? then are you over late, saw ye not the corpses of the enemy everywhere without? Thus would you be wise to retire whence you came, for there your services may be required."

"Which I may conclude they are not here," answered the Admiral with an approach to a sneer. "Yet is yours but an uncourtly greeting to a comrade in arms, Monsieur de Bayard. None the less will I not retire, the mission with which the King hath honoured me being unaccomplished. I bring an army in sooth, consisting of much of France's chivalry. These mounted *gens d'armes* I lead to meet His Grace of England, whom last we saw in arms in mimic war at Ardres, when, with the Very Christian King, myself rode by his side, with you for leader, against the traitor Bourbon."

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"I remember," answered Bayard coldly, "yet what hath your mounted troops to do in Mézières? You cannot with them man the ramparts, nor need we more horseflesh for our daily ration, the gates being now open. You best would therefore do to take them with you, and proceed to meet the English King—may victory attend you!"

"Nay, not so soon, Chevalier! and learn that one strong troop of men-at-arms must hence return with her I come in search of. Is not that, peradventure, the lady lying yonder? it is the Comtesse de Châteaubriand the King demands at your hands, I have come, by his command, to fetch her."

"Madame de Châteaubriand is not here! Have you lost your senses, Admiral? What have I to do with her, or she with me?"

"The King believes she is here—and——" Bonnivet laughed, "Madame his mother says that since once she saw her fondling your hands in loving guise—she is convinced that 'tis to you that she hath fled. Herself declared, and with our eyes we saw it, that she secretly loved you, Chevalier."

"Pish! 'twas a mere woman's freak," replied Bayard embarrassed, for he knew the story true, knew likewise the reason of the comedy.

"Freak or no freak, I beg you to take it not ill of me should I now seek to obey the King's command. What, Chevalier, is this strange tale they tell me of a wounded peasant, one that is your trumpeter? and whom have you lying yonder, in shape so very like a woman? Allow me, I beg you, view this worthy peasant's features!"

So saying, Bonnivet made a sudden attempt to pass the Chevalier. He succeeded in so far as to obtain a glimpse of a black and shock-headed form, with a dirty face, but no more, for Bayard, interposing, pushed the Admiral roughly backwards, while saying angrily,

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"Would you disturb the wounded in Bayard's tent, first must you meet Bayard's sword! Stand back, Bonnivet, or defend yourself! Yet, would you not fight about the matter, you may take my word for it, no Comtesse is there here, upon my knightly honour."

Bonnivet stepped back a pace or two, finding himself baffled, yet smiled sarcastically while demanding: "Will the saintly Bayard swear on his knightly honour that yonder form of which, despite the light covering, the shape so plainly stands revealed is not that of a woman? ay, a woman in disguise? we have heard of such things before to-day upon the tented field!"

Pausing for a reply, which he did not receive, the Admiral continued while now assuming an amicable tone.

"Come, be more friendly, Bayard, for no harm I mean the lady. I bear her gifts and friendly greetings from the King, with whom my favour is at stake. I beg you therefore treat me as a comrade, forget old scores and let me pass, if but that I may assure His Grace the King that I made due search, yet found I not his beloved Françoise, for the plain reason she was not there to find! Now, may I not see her, Bayard?"

As the Chevalier merely shook his head abruptly for reply, Bonnivet, who was indeed most anxious to regain his favour with the King, which had been much shaken since the Princess Marguerite had suddenly left the Court, returned to the attack.

"Bayard, I would have you think that now we are but friends, soldiers of France who face a common foe. As such, we surely owe one to the other courtesy. I but wish one moment to view this wounded trumpeter, be he boy or be she girl, of whom I hear such wondrous deeds related. So it be not the Comtesse, naught would I care were fifty women here within your tent! Nor, should

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I find indeed a woman lying yonder on your bed, and should I know that woman's face upon inspection, would I in my life divulge the secret. Of that, I freely pledge my knightly honour."

He paused, and then seeing his arguments still of no avail, Bonnivet added pleadingly, "Bayard, Comrade, you would not ruin me with King François!"

Bayard was now sadly perplexed. To be appealed to as from comrade to comrade, even by a man who had formerly sought his life, went to his good heart, which never wished injury to anyone.

He thought for a moment before, at length, he spoke to the Admiral in a more friendly manner than hitherto.

"Bonnivet, friend, listen to my words and mark them. That in sooth I am not your enemy, nor would harm you, must you know, if you but let your thoughts go back a little. Did not I once spare your life when another in my place had surely taken it? Thus will you confess I owe you nothing—yet nothing would I take from you—nay, not even the favour of the King, which, possessing and acting upon unjustly, you once sought to do me grievous wrong. Yet in this matter now at hand, nor help nor hindrance can you have from me, and therefore I bid you be content and go your way in peace. The Comtesse de Châteaubriand, I say, is not within this tent, nor know I where in this wide world she be."

Bonnivet looked disconsolate, he was at last almost convinced by the Chevalier's words, yet still glanced longingly towards the girlish figure on the bed. For a moment he stood in hesitation, then played what he considered to be his trump card.

"If she be not here, yet must I with all my troops stay here until she be found. King François had certain tidings that she came to Mezières, beyond

she could not go! Where then is the Comtesse? I must camp at Mézières, Bayard, if for months, and await the King's further orders."

Scarcely had the Admiral made this observation, with an air of absolute finality, than the door flap of the tent was thrown back and a veiled nun stood in the doorway.

Dramatically throwing back her veil, Françoise observed, with a scornful smile:

"Monsieur l'Amiral! Behold the lady whom you are so anxious to find, that you may retain the favour of," here she sneered, "that most honourable gentleman, the Very Christian King! Now, what would you of her?"

Bayard was no less taken aback than Bonnivet. Both stared at the Comtesse for a moment in silence, but the Chevalier it was who first found speech.

"The holy nun, who so well hath nursed the wounded! who hath not faltered in the stress of many a bloody encounter, but succoured the dying! Can this be indeed the Comtesse? I am, I vow, bewildered!"

"Come without with me, Bonnivet, I would speak to you!" Françoise spoke, using the tone of command which she had latterly been in the habit of using towards the King's despicable favourite.

The Admiral had recovered his aplomb. With a low bow and in his best Court manner, he responded debonnairly:

"A most enchanting nun, I vow, and in an enchanted fortress! If the Seigneur de Bayard be not the Merlin of the piece, where can be found the enchanter who wrought this charm?"

"Follow me without, Monsieur l'Amiral, and prate not," replied Françoise. "Haply that noble Prince the Seigneur de Fleurange might enlighten you—your brain methinks is even thicker than that of His Royal Grace your master! who loves

me so dearly that he cannot live without me!" The Comtesse laughed bitterly and when, after an apologetic bow to the Chevalier, Bonnivet had followed her without, she addressed him again, and angrily. "Fool! to think that, of all places in the world, you would find a woman in the tent of Bayard! yet that matter concerns me not—nor you, so that he did not kill you! Yet I heard it all—and now what would you have of me? no fencing, Bonnivet!"

"Madame la Comtesse," replied the Admiral contritely, for, like his master, he feared Françoise, "I bear this little packet from the King—a diamond or two of value, and these are the King's orders. Not to leave the camp, not to leave your side, to follow you like a dog from place to place until you leave this town of Mézières to rejoin His Grace, riding in a litter he hath sent for you, and escorted by a troop of my men-at-arms who will see you to him safely."

"Good!" replied Françoise. "Now listen to the orders of Madame la Comtesse de Châteaubriand, and these they are. Go to your own camp without the walls, and there remain until of her own free will and under escort from this garrison, she shall come thither; for she will rejoin the King! Yet keep you the jewels, they will serve as the pay for your most honourable mission! But see that you come no more within the gates of Mézières lest would you be flogged from its walls like the sorry hound you so resemble."

Within the tent, where the wounded Princess had been forced to undergo such a terrible ordeal, trembling with the fear of discovery, the angry words of the Comtesse could be plainly heard.

At last was heard the clinking of the Admiral's golden spurs, and then, for the third time, Anne's trumpet in salutation, as the King's favourite left the gates,

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Bayard rejoined Marguerite's bedside and looked sadly at her, then, while she tore her disguise from her head, and threw off the concealing cloak, of which the heat was unbearable, he brought her water and a towel.

Soon the dirt stains which, owing to Anne's forethought, had proved so efficacious, had been removed, and the Princess was her own beautiful self once more.

Yet were neither Marguerite nor Bayard thinking of self at that moment, but of Madame de Châteaubriand.

"My Bayard!" exclaimed Marguerite presently, while laying her hand upon his arm. "Do you understand it all? do you take in what Françoise is doing? her wealth of self-sacrifice! She is now sacrificing her life for me, that Bonnivet discover me not, ay, sacrificing her love as well, for she loves Fleurange as I love you. Yet will she leave him, to return to the life she loathes with my brother the King."

"Oh! great but loathly sacrifice!" exclaimed Bayard with grief, "yet must it not be permitted, Marguerite, she returns to a life of sin!—'twill be one long life of sacrifice indeed. For whatever she may be to Fleurange, who is alas! I fear, no saint, here hath her life been ennobling, purifying—an angel of sweetness she hath been from day to day. Holding the cross before their dying eyes, while musket ball and bolt from arbalest sped past unheeded, she smoothed the road to heaven, soothed the last dying pangs of some poor sinner! Alas! how will our wounded miss her tender succour! Yet must she not go! she must be saved from this life of infamy, dear Marguerite."

The Princess melted into tears. "Yet how can we save her, Pierre, now that she hath discovered herself? Much as I love my brother, you know the King! his headstrongness! And now will he

not be baulked. One army hath he sent with Bonnivet. Even should we within this garrison resist, with force of arms, to save dear Françoise, stay her going, another army will he send, if needs be, to take her rather than his pride be injured in the sight of all. The Germans, English, all will be forgotten! and Madame, my mother, aiding with her angry counsels, François will have his way. Thus will ensue some terrible disaster, and France, maybe, be humbled in the dust that he may have his way. And yet he no longer loves her—oh! 'tis most pitiable—and for my sake!”

Here the Princess broke down completely, but, while Bayard strove to comfort the woman whom he loved, he was thinking.

“I see a plan, my Marguerite, whereby she may be saved, should she but agree. 'Tis woman's right, they say, to change her mind, and a ruse in love is, as a ruse of war, from days of olden time acknowledged. Moreover, I have given no undertaking to send back this most ill-used woman to that sad life from which she late—although I knew it not—hath fled, nor will I countenance her going.”

“A plan! oh, let me hear it, Pierre!”

“'Tis this, the road to Sedan now lies open, and thither, to his warlike father's care, would I send the wounded Fleurange, and Françoise shall go with him, in her nunlike garb, as now. And you as well, of whom, if God so will it, would I make my wife. For here no longer can you stay! To-morrow's morn, with Fleurange I would send you and your little English maid, with all befitting escort, to the Duchesse de Bouillon, the venerable mother of my dear comrade Fleurange. There will you be safe until, in fitting season, your wound recovered, you can travel to Alençon, and none may know it.”

“Oh! Bayard, now do I love you more, if such were possible,” exclaimed Marguerite, “your brain

indeed is fertile in expedient!—yet if she will not go, having given her word?”

“Then shall she go by force,” exclaimed Bayard—“hath not Fleurange enough troops to constrain her? Yet upon me the King’s blame shall fall. I will say ’twas I who sent her hence, against her will.”

Her deep violet eyes still swimming with tears, Marguerite gazed up with admiration at her lover. The strength of his manly character but endeared him the more to her. Even with courage as he now displayed to resist the King, in order to follow the course he considered to be right, had he not struggled manfully against her passion and his own? And woman-like, the Princess, although herself less scrupulous, in her heart admired Bayard the more for his noble firmness.

CHAPTER XXIV

BAYARD SUPS WITH KING HENRY

THE Princess Marguerite and Anne Boleyn had been sent away in safety with Françoise and the Seigneur de Fleurange, while Bonnivet, crestfallen, continued his march in his abortive attempt to come into contact with the forces of the English Henry. To console himself, however, the Admiral had the diamonds flung at him so scornfully by the Comtesse, and, to a man of his despicable character, the possession of these valuable gems made up for a good deal of disappointment in another direction.

The Chevalier after a short time determined to quit Mézières, which no longer required a garrison, and which place would, he felt, henceforward ever hold for him such happy memories.

The scene of his departure from the town which he had saved was one of triumph. As he and his gallant soldiers marched out of the gates, nothing could have been more touching than the way in which the inhabitants crowded round the hero, while making the air ring again with their enthusiastic cheers. While, mounted upon his great black war-horse, Bayard with difficulty could force his way through the throng, the women of the place, whom he had saved from outrage, vied with their husbands and lovers in crowding around him to kiss his feet, his hands, his stirrup irons, even his horse.

While tears of joy sprung to the eyes of Pierre de Terrail to think from what horrors he had

preserved these poor people, he had another source of satisfaction in the thought that, by his heroic defence of a city considered untenable, he had given to King François the time wherein to raise an army wherewith to follow up the enemy into the Province of Hainault, which they held. As, getting at length clear of the worshipping crowd, Bayard rode further away from the walls, L'Allègre, as ever by his side, was delighted to behold the bright and cheerful countenance of his noble chief, and yet was somewhat surprised when suddenly he beheld Bayard's handsome features convulsed by a fit of uncontrollable laughter.

"What is it, my Seigneur? Keep it not all to yourself, I pray," exclaimed the squire, who was already laughing for very sympathy. "Yet have a care, I beg, lest, after escaping so many and great dangers, you fall into another—that of rolling from your horse into a dusty road."

"Oh, L'Allègre," responded the Chevalier, "how can I help from laughter when it comes to my mind? To think of how we set those beggarly Germans all a-flying at each others' throats, and, moreover, that Nassau and Seckingen will no more now fight together under the Emperor! I must needs laugh whenever I recall it to memory until my dying day. 'Twas the cheapest way in which ever yet an important siege was raised—merely a piece of paper and a little ink, and forty thousand melted like wax!"

While joining heartily in his master's merriment, L'Allègre retorted. "'Tis a joke at which not we alone but the whole of France are laughing, my Seigneur, ay, one that France still will laugh at long after your dying day. Yet," added the squire with a sly sidelong look at Bayard's face, "will France say that it is pity that the Chevalier's brave trumpeter disappeared so sudden into Switzerland that Bayard could not bring him before the King for his reward."

"Have a care! L'Allègre," responded Pierre de Terrail, but, as the reproof was accompanied by a joyous smile, L'Allègre pursued his subject, fearless of any possible rebuke.

"Ay, my Master, and the little trumpeter boy of the Seigneur de Fleurange as well. I kissed the lad heartily though before he left, and there were I vow, great tears in his eyes at bidding me farewell. And my Seigneur, now would you believe it? the kissing of that lad was wondrous like the kissing of a woman. Had he but been dressed in girl's clothes, I doubt not but he had been more like his brother!"

But Bayard, not knowing how far this conversation might lead, put the spurs to his horse, leaving the worthy L'Allègre behind to chuckle alone. For never had the squire been deceived as to the identity of either of the trumpeters from the first, although he had been far too loyal to the Princess to disclose her secret.

Receiving no instructions to the contrary from the King, who knew not indeed where he was or what he was doing, Bayard marched slowly on from city to city towards the north. At every place at which he arrived he found himself hailed as the saviour of France, and thus, although no pay was ever received by him from the State, the inhabitants of the towns through which he passed voluntarily taxed themselves for the support of the famous Chevalier and his troops.

Notably was this the case in Picardy, which was still being ravaged by the English troops, of which various marauding parties were met and easily dispersed, greatly to the delight of the suffering peasantry.

Pierre de Terrail had, however, in head to fly at higher game, he aimed, although he told no one, at nothing less than the capture of the English King. In this design he might have been successful, yet was fate against him.

When approaching a small city to which King Henry had, after a purposeless pretence of warfare, retired, Bayard had halted for the night, for the purpose of reconnoitring the walls preparatory to endeavouring to storm them on the morrow. Presently, to his surprise, some English knights, with whom he was personally acquainted, came boldly riding into his camp, while flying a flag of truce.

Receiving these seigneurs with all due courtesy, great was the astonishment of Pierre de Terrail to learn their news. This was that their King had withdrawn his alliance from the young Emperor, and had sent messengers proposing terms of peace to the Very Christian King. Under these circumstances, Henry had sent his officers to Bayard to propose that a state of truce should be observed between them, and to invite him to sup with him in the town.

Before accepting the invitation, the Chevalier, old soldier that he was, took care by careful questioning to assure himself that he was not about to be decoyed into a trap from which he would not easily escape.

When, however, his friends the Lords Willoughby and Percy, with whom he had had many a tilting match at Ardres, assured him on their knightly honour that they spoke the truth, he gave them his hand and accepted the Royal invitation. Leaving his men-at-arms under the command of De Lorges and Du Bellay, the Chevalier rode in to meet King Henry, by whom he was received as an old friend, especially as when last they had met Henry had ridden under Bayard's command in the celebrated mock battle at Ardres.

From the English King Bayard learned the reason of his defection from his nephew by marriage, Charles V. Without any beating about the bush, Henry informed Pierre de Terrail of that which

had not yet become generally known. This was that Pope Leo X. was dead, and that instead of Cardinal Wolsey having, as he had expected, been elected in his place, the Emperor Charles had contrived to procure the election to the Papal throne of his own former tutor Adrian of Utrecht, who had taken the title of Adrian VI. It had, so Henry now explained without any circumlocution, been his Chancellor the Cardinal of York who had made the war so far as England was concerned, solely in the hopes of being supported in his aspirations by the Emperor. Now, however, that Charles V. had failed him, he was willing and anxious to become once more the friend of France, hoping for the French support on the occasion of the next vacancy occurring in Rome.

When Henry informed Bayard, quite seriously, that if he would but try to influence François so as to incline him to a French alliance, he would be certain of the Cardinal's eternal gratitude and future assistance, he could but laugh heartily in the King's face. Nor did he scruple to say that he feared that he was not a strong enough player to play cards at the same table with His Eminence, even as his partner. Nevertheless it immediately crossed Bayard's mind that he had heard that Adrian, whom he had formerly known, was but in poor health, and he thought that were the Cardinal sincere, as his interest might indeed prompt him to be, he himself might before long by no means regret having put the next possible Pope under obligations to the Seigneur de Bayard.

Thus he did not flatly refuse King Henry's suggestions, being too diplomatic, and presently the latter, growing confidential over his wine, began to talk of his own personal concerns. These, to the astonishment of the Chevalier, had to do with his hopes of obtaining a divorce from his Spanish wife Catherine, and of contracting a marriage with

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the sweet little maid-of-honour of the Duchesse d'Alençon, with whom, as talking between comrades, he owned himself to be hopelessly in love. Bayard was diplomatically sympathetic, and when he at length left the English King bore in his pocket a letter for Anne, which he promised faithfully, on his knightly honour, to deliver to her should he ever see her again. Yet he was careful not to inform the love-sick young Monarch when, where and how he had seen Anne Boleyn last. King Henry's last words, however, were rather ominous: "But Gadzooks! Chevalier, with Charles V. for Emperor and Adrian, his tutor, for Pope, but little chance will there be for a divorce for anybody belonging to the opposing faction, be he Prince or peasant."

As Bayard rode slowly home to his camp he pondered on these words. Of course, the wife from whom the English King sought divorce was the aunt of the Emperor Charles, but what greater chance, thought Pierre de Terrail, would the sister of the Very Christian King, the Emperor's greatest enemy, have of obtaining a dissolution of marriage? Thinking thus, he went sadly to his camp bed, to dream of his dearly loved Marguerite de Valois.

Leaving Picardy, Bayard marched gradually through the north of France to Paris, and there he arrived at about the same time as King François, who returned in the greatest good humour from his successful campaign in Hainault.

By François, who said not a word on the subject of the Comtesse de Châteaubriand, the Chevalier was received as he merited, with the most marked distinction as the saviour of France. He was invested by the King with the collar of the highest order of the realm, that of Saint Michael, and further given the captaincy-in-chief of a company of one hundred men-at-arms, all of whom were nobles of rank or distinction and proud to serve under his command.

There was, however, one circumstance to mar the pleasure that Bayard, modest though he was, might have derived from these honours. This was the fact that the Princess Marguerite was not present in Paris, to express her satisfaction at the recognition of his services, which he felt, had it not been for her own distinguished share in them he would never have been alive to receive.

Upon enquiry, he heard that she was supposed to be at Alençon, and Anne Boleyn with her. Even the King and his mother had no certain tidings. The former vaguely believed his sister to be travelling to visit the Kingdom of Navarre in the south, but seemed to have no interest in her movements, while as for Madame, she was in such an ill humour, owing to the defection, chiefly her own fault, of the Duc de Bourbon, that she cared not in the least for any matter which concerned any person but herself. Her chief object in life had become the acquisition of money, and she was now busy in rapidly acquiring an immense fortune at the cost of the State, owing to which her son and his troops were to suffer before long.

Finding his stay in Paris wearying in the extreme, and the more so owing to the rancorous jealousy of other captains, who had not equally distinguished themselves, Bayard determined to take the first opportunity of proceeding again on active service.

Nor was it very long before the mismanagement of the Governor of Milan, who was the Maréchal Odet de Foix, Seigneur de Lautrec, the brother of Françoise, led to the King requesting the Chevalier to proceed to Italy, there to give a fresh example of his devotion to France.

CHAPTER XXV

A LETTER FOR THE CHEVALIER

ODET DE FOIX was, like the whole of his gallant race, as brave as a lion, he was also unfortunately unscrupulous and cruel. When therefore, by secretly diverting to her own use four hundred thousands of golden crowns, intended for the army in Lombardy, Louise de Savoie left the troops without pay, the brother of the Comtesse employed his own methods of procuring cash in the great Duchy of Milan, in which François had established his Sovereignty.

Unfortunately, these methods were so peculiarly ingenious that the whole of the north of Italy was soon in an uproar, with the result that Francesco Sforza, brother of the former Duke of Milan, aided by the Imperial troops, under that fine soldier Colonna, ejected Odet de Foix from the Duchy.

After having rendered some splendid services in subduing Genoa, which had likewise revolted from France, Bayard marched up to the Duchy in order to assist Lautrec in recapturing Milan. The Chevalier, however, merely arrived in time to cover the retreat of the brave but unfortunate Odet, after the crushing defeat which he received before the walls of La Bicocca, near Milan. While performing numberless noble actions, the Chevalier formed the rearguard of the shattered forces back into the south of France, and was present when the plague broke out among them with terrible severity.

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During the continuance of this fearful epidemic, Bayard, with L'Allègre by his side, spared himself not. While constantly nursing those dying from the loathsome disease, he gave all that he had for the relief of the poor and sick, and eventually, by his strict enforcement of sanitary measures, caused the abatement of the awful scourge.

No sooner had the epidemic passed away, than once again François called upon the noble Chevalier for his assistance, as everything was going wrong. Although the Spaniards had invaded Guyenne, and Henry of England, having again joined the Emperor, had crossed the Meuse with an allied army of thirty-five thousand men, nothing would do for the Very Christian King but to endeavour to re-conquer his lost Italian Duchy.

Now it was that Bayard gave indeed a proof of his devotion to Marguerite's brother, by consenting to fight in the new army of Italy under the supreme command of the incompetent Admiral of France, Bonnivet.

To Italy the Chevalier therefore marched once again, at the head of his own splendid men-at-arms, and no sooner had he appeared in Lombardy than he signalled his arrival by the brilliant storm of Lodi.

Then, while Bonnivet was in difficulties, a terrible winter fell upon the French troops, and during that season of stress Pierre de Terrail fell back upon the river Ticino, to aid his old enemy the Admiral. In the spring, however, as ever on the alert, Bayard endeavoured to push Bonnivet to shew a firm front, while encouraging him with his own brilliant example.

Now if ever was there required for the army of France that which alas! it did not possess, a capable leader. For, the redoubtable ex-Constable, Charles de Bourbon had come to Italy, to join the coalition of the Imperial forces, of which Francesco Sforza,

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Charles de Lannoy the Spanish Viceroy of Naples, and the Marquis de Pescara were the other noted leaders.

Against all of their German, Swiss, Italian, and Spanish troops Bonnivet, for ever making mistakes, made but a lamentable shewing. Nor, in his fool-hardy self-confidence, could he be prevailed upon to accept the wise advice tendered to him by Pierre de Terrail.

On the other hand, in his overweening pride and jealousy, Bonnivet lost no opportunity of flouting Bayard, moreover of despatching him to situations of danger, where his presence, and that of his devoted men-at-arms, could be of no possible military utility.

Upon one of these occasions, while the arrogant Admiral was encamped with his main body upon a stream called the Ticinella at Biagrasso, Bayard found himself sent forward and garrisoning an outlying village named Robecco, near Milan.

The river Ticino flowed behind this village, and as the Chevalier stood without his tent door, and gazed towards a bridge which crossed the river at a distance, he addressed his squire.

"'Tis three long months, my good L'Allègre, since we entered Lombardy, and, had we but served under any other General, we had retaken Milan long ago. The King was surely mad to give to Bonnivet the chief command, and I a fool to consent to fight under his orders."

"Ay, my Seigneur, and 'twould seem a mad action indeed to send us to occupy this hole of a place, having neither walls nor ditches, not even ramparts! Why 'tis worse than Mézières! And here we have the enemy but at a stone's throw from us. Some of the men-at-arms were saying but yesterday, how well they recalled to mind your speech at Mézières, about our being able to resist for a whole day with naught but a four-foot ditch in front. They said

that, in spite of such poor earthworks as we have been able to throw up in this rocky soil, here 'tis not much better. Yet, my master, what induced you to pledge yourself to the King to fight under the orders of his precious favourite, one who hath a head no better than a frost-bitten turnip in the spring?"

"Twas for France, L'Allègre, above all, for the soldiers of France. I would not see them butchered needlessly, and therefore accepted the King's honourable charge, hoping by my presence perchance to avert some great disaster. Yet in this ill-chosen, hill-commanded outpost, with but two hundred men-at-arms and the two thousand footmen of the Seigneur de Lorges, how can we carry out our instructions, to harass the large force holding Milan, to keep ourselves instructed of their movements, above all, to intercept their provisions?"

"'Tis laughable, my Seigneur, 'tis easy to see the Admiral got his lessons in war among the petticoats that he so much frequents. Doth he imagine that the Spaniards, or the rebel Bourbon and his well trained men, are but so many foolish women—that one has but sudden to throw up one's arms at them, and cry out boo! when they will all run away?"

"Yet, L'Allègre, are the Spaniards somewhat like women after all, for when they run before our sallies they but come back the bolder, seeing we harm them but little. Thus is your simile good—yet are the facts distressing, and Bonnivet no soldier."

"Ay, my master, and, in consequence, the men are daily offering me counsels, which they would have me convey to your ears; yet, Seigneur, do I know my condition better than to make so bold."

"What say they, my trusty friend? speak out and fear not, nor will I reprove you. A Captain hath oft ere now done well to listen to his men, for good counsel well may come from an humble source."

"There is a rumour, my Seigneur, that the Admiral himself will visit this place shortly, so be it

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not already fallen and we all dead. The men would have you, therefore, point out to him that by no known rules of war should one hold a village as this Robecco. They grumble fiercely at the General and his most strange manœuvres."

"L'Allègre, one may speak to a stone wall, but will it listen? One may speak to the river yonder, but will it turn its waters and run uphill? Yet, friend, would you do well to tell the men that wrong are they to murmur thus fiercely, not knowing their General's plans. In this maybe I do offend myself, yet 'tis to you alone, and in secret. But how can the soldier know? that which to him seems inscrutable may great designs conceal?"

The squire laughed. "Can you imagine, my Seigneur, any very great designs concealed beneath the Admiral's inscrutable commands? Then, I vow! see you more than your squire L'Allègre."

Bayard could but smile. "What! mutiny in you, as well!" Then he added, "I will within my tent, while all is quiet for a space. And rest you likewise while you have the chance, 'tis likely enough we shall both be afoot once more to-night."

"Ay, my Seigneur, we shall have the usual night alarms, and there will be the sentinels to visit on their posts, since you trust no man but yourself! Thus an hour's rest were surely needful."

While the squire retired, Bayard threw himself down upon his camp bed, a portable one which had long accompanied him in his wanderings. And as he lay there, instead of sleeping, his thoughts reverted to a fair woman who also once had lain upon that bed while he, for a space, had been present by her side.

Marguerite de Valois it was of whom he thought so deeply, and with the more intensity that he knew her to be in Italy, although he knew not where then she might be. He was aware that the Princess, restless at home, had some time since set forth from

France, with her cousin the Princess Renée de France, daughter of the late Louis XII. and sister to Queen Claude. This young Princess, whose hand had been held out as a marriage bait to many a great Prince, although match after match came to naught, had at length been definitely affianced to an Italian Prince of importance, in the person of Alfonso d'Este, Duke of Ferrara, to whom it had been resolved to send her. Owing to the disturbed state of Italy, where armies of different nationalities, chiefly hostile to France, were marching about in every direction, the difficulty had been how to get the young bride to the bridegroom. There was but one chance of so doing, and that was to arrange matters so as to obtain the protection of the new Pope. It had so happened that since the last meeting between Bayard and King Henry, in the north of Picardy, Cardinal Wolsey had again been disappointed in his hopes of ascending to the Papal throne. For when Adrian VI. had died, after but a very short tenancy of the Chair of Saint Peter, the new Pope elected had not been the Cardinal of York. It was Giulio de Medici, the illegitimate cousin of Leo X., who had become Pope, while taking the title of Clement VII.

This new Medici Pope was a most shifty person, a trimmer from the first. Anxious to join the King of France to oust Charles V. and his Imperial forces, not only from Naples but the whole of Italy, he yet feared to declare himself openly.

Accordingly he truckled likewise with the Emperor, hoping, with what eventually proved to be but a vain hope, to preserve his temporal dominions undisturbed, while yet avoiding the crowning of Charles upon Italian soil, as the supreme lord of the Holy Roman Empire.

To Henry of England this illegitimate scion of the Medici family proved no more acceptable than to the other potentates of Europe. For although

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not the ally of the Emperor, yet did Clement continually put off the divorce for which Henry begged so urgently, from fear of offending the powerful nephew of the Queen from whom the divorce was desired.

Trusted by none, not even by the Duke of Ferrara, part of whose dominions he wished to annex to his own, yet had it been to Clement that François had been compelled to make a show of confidence in many matters. And now Bayard lay upon his camp bed wondering whether or no the Princess Marguerite with her cousin had reached the Papal presence in safety, and moreover if, had the Princesses reached him, the Pope had aided them to proceed to Ferrara.

One other point the Chevalier pondered upon. Yet so great was its importance that had he been able to do so he would willingly have thrust it from his brain. This was whether, if Marguerite had arrived safely in Rome, she had been able to obtain the consent of Clement VII. to a divorce from her unworthy husband.

Thinking and thinking, the wearied body at length overcame the wearied brain, and Bayard, who had not had a night's repose for weeks past, at length fell asleep.

The afternoon was well advanced, when a cool breeze blowing upon him awakened the Chevalier, whose slumber was ever of the lightest.

Starting up, he perceived L'Allègre standing watching him from within the open doorway, silent as if fearing to disturb his master.

"What is it?" he exclaimed briskly, for after a couple of hours' repose the great soldier felt himself thoroughly refreshed. "Is it that daring Count de Soto Mayor returning again to annoy me with his Parthian tactics? Is my horse ready? my lance?"

"Nay, Seigneur, the Count hath probably, like ourselves, been enjoying his afternoon siesta, for

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a wonder, he hath not shewn himself to-day, yet have I other tidings—two matters of interest.”

“Two! well one at a time! the first one, Squire?”

“The first is, my Seigneur, that the sentinel on the Church tower hath reported a force advancing hither from the direction of Biagrasso. 'Tis probably the Admiral, yet is he so far off that it cannot be rightly discovered if it be he or no.”

“Good, well now, friend, for the second item?”

“The second item, my master, is this. One hath come here with a letter for you! 'Tis a muleteer, and he says that with great pains hath he journeyed hither from the Court of d'Este at Ferrara. With difficulty hath he traversed the Spanish lines, and is most travel-worn.”

“From Ferrara, you say, L'Allègre!—then the Princesses?”

“They have arrived safe, my Seigneur, His Holiness the new Pope escorted them as far as Bologna in person.”

“But the letter! Squire, the letter! maybe it is important tidings from the Duke our ally—much depends on his continued friendship.”

“Nay, my master, 'tis not from the Duke Alfonso but from the Duchesse d'Alençon that the muleteer had this packet—and, see, here it is, all wrapped up still in the dirty kerchief in which he had it concealed, in the grass which lined his baskets of oranges.”

“Ah! a right careful messenger, I perceive! See well to his wants, let him lack for nothing. And coming from Madame d'Alençon the letter may be yet of more importance than were it from d'Este himself, for although all knew it not”—here Bayard smiled at his own cunning—“that great lady hath more knowledge of military matters than some imagine. You may retire therefore, L'Allègre, until I learn its import.” The Chevalier spoke without the slightest sign of impatience.

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Had but Bayard been able to witness the knowing smile upon his squire's face as he left the tent, he would not perhaps have had such a great opinion of his own skill in the art of dissembling, but, fortunately, he did not see—nor did he suspect.

To see Bayard, however, as slowly he turned the missive over and over in his hand without breaking the seal, none would have suspected him of the burning impatience which possessed him to know the contents, although, like a timid child, he feared by the simple process of breaking the seal to learn what was within. Well now did he know that much-loved handwriting, although but twice had he seen it. Once had been when Marguerite had shown him the manuscript pages of her *Heptameron*, the other time when, as his trumpeter whom he had failed to recognise, she had written for him the fateful letter which had brought about such wonderful results at Mézières.

The sight of the clearly inscribed address reminded him so forcibly of such great events in which Marguerite had borne such a wonderful part, that he would now have liked to have passed them all over in delightful review in his mind, before, by cutting the seal, exposing himself perchance to being cast into the depths of despair. For had not his dear Marguerite seen the Pope? and should the answer of His Holiness to the Princess have been no, then, never, so long as he lived, could he, as a God-fearing knight, venture more to entertain thoughts of love for her in his heart.

No, then must he set his heel firmly down upon that which would have become but an unhallowed passion, crush it as though it had been a very adder! At length, recalling to mind the fact that his squire had informed him that the Admiral was probably approaching, Bayard took his dagger and cut the seal, upon which were imprinted the Royal Arms of France.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE FIGHT WITH SOTO MAYOR

MARGUERITE'S letter was long and most interesting, for well had she employed her ready pen. Thus, with poetic imagery, she described to Bayard her travelling by sea to Italy, her impressions of the ancient city of Pisa, its leaning tower and wonderful cathedral, by her visit to which her religious enthusiasm and archæological interest had alike been aroused. And then came the journey, under the escort of the magnificent young Lorenzo de' Medici, to Florence, to meet his cousin the Pope. For to Rome, to the disappointment of both the Princesses, it had not been necessary to go to find His Holiness Clement VII. After a description of the magnificence of their reception at Florence, the Princess told of the state in which the Pope had conducted her cousin and herself to Bologna, and the grandeur of the ceremony in that city by which the young Renée became the bride of Alfonso d'Este. Nor was this part of the letter merely descriptive, but interspersed with amusing and sometimes satirical remarks, concerning the great people with whom Marguerite had come in contact, above all with anecdotes concerning the unconventional behaviour of Anne Boleyn, who, more skittish than ever, in her exuberance of high spirits, appeared to have both shocked and amused the Italian Cardinals and Princes by her pranks.

When the letter proceeded to give, in detail, a

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description of the fortifications of Ferrara, and the powerful artillery which Alfonso d'Este had there accumulated, the reader was thrown into a state of admiration.

"What a grip hath my Marguerite indeed of military affairs," thought Bayard, "not a thing hath escaped her which she thinks it would be needful for me, as a soldier, to learn! The calibre of the guns, the number of the horses for their transportation, the careful enumeration of the Duke of Ferrara's troops, all are here set out! Of a surety, not for nothing was she for so long my trumpeter at Mézières! And yet, wisely, no word hath she said in reference to her stay in that place, save what I can read between the lines, yet no other reader understand."

Yet reading further, where the personal affairs of the Princess in the past were not concerned, Bayard found that Marguerite, while entering into diplomatic details, had abandoned her excess of caution. For she informed him, much that he would know, to the effect that, although he had espoused a French Princess, yet was Alfonso d'Este, like the Pope, wavering in his alliance to France. The cause of this shakiness on their part was, so the Princess explained, solely due to the evident incompetence of the Admiral of France, owing to which the Duchy of Alfonso d'Este and the Papal realms alike became daily more exposed to the fury of the Emperor's conquering arms. Thus Marguerite admonished the Chevalier, who indeed needed not her warning, concerning Bonnivet, in the following words: "Do your best then, my beloved Bayard, to guide the Admiral to victory, for with one more defeat, our doubting allies will be lost to France. The man is brave, 'tis said, yet is he foolish, overwhelmed with pride, full of his own importance—on the battlefield as in the lady's boudoir, as well past experience hath shewn, vainly

deems himself irresistible. Though hard may be the task, strive to correct this coxcomb, lest through him and his vainglory the name of France be lowered for ever here in Italy."

From the subject of Bonnivet, Marguerite passed to that of the Pope. "To me His Holiness hath been most gracious. He hath promised that shortly will he return to Rome, and there instruct his secretary to draw up a dispensation, greater even than divorce, since it will annul my loveless marriage as had it never been."

After some more details concerning the Pope's intentions of bestowing his blessings upon the Princess in her new union, and with prayers for Bayard's health and welfare, this long letter ended with the words,

"She that will be your wife,

"MARGUERITE de VALOIS."

The Chevalier had read the letter, and, with it in his hand, stood musing. "She that will be my wife, Marguerite de Valois! And with the Papal blessing on our heads! Oh! God be praised! henceforth to nourish in my thoughts sweet dreams of that dear soul indeed will be no sin. But first must we have peace, with France triumphant, and, to that end, the utmost will I do for Bonnivet. Would but he hear my words, I have a plan will outwit Bourbon and Charles de Lannoy. This day, so he would listen, might we waylay Pescara marching up to join the Viceroy! I'll speak to him with kindness, the time hath surely come for our concerted action."

Seating himself, Bayard once more spread out the folds of Marguerite's precious epistle on his knees, and was re-perusing it when L'Allègre, entering, exclaimed: "The Lord Admiral hath arrived from Biagrasso, my Seigneur. He stands without and would have speech of you."

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Hurriedly folding up his letter, and thrusting it under the pillow of his camp bed, Bayard gave the order to admit Bonnivet, who entered at once, with the friendly greeting :

"Good morrow, Comrade, may I rest with you awhile? long is the march from Biagrasso and I am most fatigued."

"You salute me as your comrade," replied Bayard, "as such I bid you welcome—L'Allègre, the Admiral is doubtless athirst, bring hither goblets and that sparkling wine of Asti."

The wine having been brought and the visitor seated, the Chevalier resumed.

"Now Bonnivet, what brings you here to-day? Is it perchance to recall this detachment, of which you recognise the false position? Ay, surely, with the soldier's eye, advancing hither, yourself hath seen 'tis useless, our men in constant danger, which is for naught?"

"Of that will we speak presently, Bayard. By Saint Michael this wine is good! the Duc Louis d'Orléans, ancestor to our King, played well his cards in marrying the heiress of Asti. This draught is worth the morning's ride! I vow 'tis most refreshing!"

Courteously the Chevalier himself refilled the cup for his guest, while sitting silently expectant. Presently the Admiral remarked: "This is the object of my visit—to tell you that my Italian spies returned at dawn this day, bringing me sure tidings that the road is clear to Milan, of which the garrison hath been depleted, merely Francesco Sforza there remaining. Thus will I advance and storm the city, retake it for the King, make for ever glorious the name of Bonnivet! Already my men are marching."

"Were but the news true, then must I go with you, Admiral. Yet it is false, whence had you your spies?"

"They are deserters from the camp of Bourbon,

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who hath gone northwards, and right trusty men !”

At this the Chevalier sprang indignantly to his feet.

“Deserters and yet trusty men! have you lost your senses, Bonnivet? They are, I tell you, liars from the camp of Satan, spies of that arch-rebel Charles de Bourbon, sent to you by himself. When you rejoin your forces, your honest, trusty men no longer will be there, but have returned to Bourbon, where he still is, in Milan, to tell him you are blindly marching to your doom. And he will laugh at you, as ever in the past he laughed and mocked you!” The Admiral was commencing to protest angrily, when Bayard cut him short.

“Now hear the truth! While Lannoy, Viceroy of Naples, lies where he did, 'twixt us and Milan, Pescara meanwhile is advancing on our right flank—he comes from the south to join the others. Thus, would you really do a glorious deed, one to become famous, the way is plain.

“Divert hither your advancing troops; when they have crossed the river, I and all within this garrison will join them. Dividing them into two equal parties, together will we march easterly, yet one inclining northward the other to the south. Thus shall we catch Pescara between two fires, crush him to atoms, ere Lannoy come to help him. Say, is it agreed, Bonnivet? If you so choose it, I will take the northern route, that nearer Milan, wherein there is the greater danger, yet doubt I not that thus we gain a vast success.”

“A vast success, coupled with the name of Bayard!” answered Bonnivet with a sneer. “Nay,” he added, “I approve not of your plan, and since 'tis not to you I look for orders, will not follow it. I trust to my information—yours is wrong, Chevalier.”

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At this moment the sound of some desultory firing was heard in the distance, and immediately afterwards L'Allègre entered to report: "My Seigneur, the Count de Soto Mayor, with a Spanish troop, presses forward to the earthworks. He shews even more than usual daring. The Count, in taunting guise, calls upon you by name to come forth and fight him. The horses and an hundred men-at-arms, await you, Seigneur, an you would teach this vaunting Spaniard a lesson."

"Excuse me, Admiral, for a little space," exclaimed Bayard, as he rose hastily.

"Who is this Soto Mayor?" exclaimed Bonnivet languidly, "that you trouble about his presence even when busied with your commander? Were I in your place, Bayard, I would let the Spanish cockerel crow himself hoarse ere I would stir for him before sundown. 'Tis now too hot for fighting. Rest till we finish the wine at least."

"Nay, Bonnivet, I cannot stay, yet remain you, and take your repose. For learn that Don Alonzo de Soto Mayor, although a gallant knight, is yet slippery as an eel—thrice lately hath he escaped me after a skirmish.

"Moreover he hath given me personal offence demanding reparation, as I have written to him. Thus to-day, peradventure, will he stand. Twice in the past hath he been my prisoner, when once he broke his parole and departed, yet, despite this unknighly trick, the second time treated I him not unkindly. I put him not in chains, yet took his ransom, which, in his presence I distributed to the soldiers."

"Which would not I have done," interposed Bonnivet. "The ransom of one of his rank should be large enough to be worth the keeping!"

Disregarding this remark—one typical of the Admiral, Bayard continued: "Since last I set Soto Mayor at liberty much hath he defamed me, saying

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to other noble seigneurs, who, grieved to hear his libel, wrote me of it, that not as a gentleman was it that I treated him in his captivity. Now, see you the cause of quarrel, Bonnivet?"

"Ay, 'tis plain as a pikestaff, nor should you miss an opportunity of punishing the felon Spaniard. Kill him if you can, say I, for well such an one merits death—nor spare him, Bayard, should you have him down, and should he plead for mercy. We cannot afford to have our prisoners leave without paying their ransoms, money is hard to come by in times of war!"

"Nay, but will I spare him, should I gain the upper hand. His manners are refined and he is a gentle knight, ay, one whom I like for all his treasons. Yet grieve I thus he hath been misguided."

While the Admiral laughed sarcastically at this trait of the Chevalier's generosity towards an enemy who had injured him, Bayard, who had finished arming, went out, after again bidding the Admiral to treat his tent as though it were his own.

No sooner had the Chevalier mounted and ridden off with his squire than the rascally Bonnivet obeyed this friendly request far too literally. He had heard that the muleteer whom he had seen was a messenger from d'Este, and, upon entering the tent, had observed Pierre de Terrail in the act of concealing a letter under his pillow. Rendered the more curious, and moreover suspicious, from the fact that his host had made no mention of having received news of Ferrara, the Admiral went straight to the bed, and abstracted the letter!

Upon arriving with his men without the village, Bayard perceived the Count de Soto Mayor, with a number of men-at-arms about equal to his own, drawn up beyond arquebus-shot from the low earthworks. Without hesitation, the Chevalier set his troop in motion, while the Spaniard did the same.

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The shock between the two troops was terrible, but while the two leaders, who were both adroit, shivered their lances on each other's shields, the men of the Chevalier, being better trained, at once had the upper hand of the Spaniards, who were new troops recently imported from Spain. They fled, leaving a number of dead upon the field.

With the Chevalier's men-at-arms rode Du Bellay, and this officer, having been instructed in advance by Bayard, instead of pursuing, returned at once with his troop after the charge, while disposing his men in such a manner as to cut off the retreat of the Count, who had wheeled his horse and was endeavouring to rejoin his retiring soldiers.

While the Spanish nobleman halted, expecting to be made a prisoner, for the third time, by the knight whose honour he had so basely taken away, Bayard, attended by L'Allègre, rode up to him.

"Seigneur de Bayard, what would you of me?" exclaimed the Spaniard, who now shewed a bold front.

"Count Alonzo de Soto Mayor," answered Pierre de Terrail, "I propose to defend my honour against you. Descend from your horse, therefore, as will I from mine, and draw your sword." So saying, aided by his squire, Bayard lighted down from his charger. Courteously assisted by Du Bellay, the Count also dismounted, and, while the men-at-arms formed a circle around them, the combatants faced one another.

The Chevalier and his enemy were armed in similar fashion, each wearing a steel skull cap below the helm, which defence for the temples was known as a "secrète," and a gorget to protect the joint where the helm joined the cuirass. Each carried a long straight sword, used exclusively for thrusting with the point, in the right hand, while, the shield being cast aside, a poniard was held in the left.

Both of the combatants being strong, brave and agile, from the moment that they engaged a brilliant exhibition of fencing was to be witnessed. The

Spaniard it was who at first, attacking, indulged in furious lunges, while Pierre de Terrail contented himself in parrying his enemy's thrusts with marvellous promptitude and skill. Suddenly, judging that the Count had somewhat exhausted himself, Bayard reversed matters. Attacking in turn, with wonderful rapidity his point was opposed to every weak spot in the armour of his antagonist. Active, and splendid fencer as was Alonzo de Soto Mayor, he was unable to parry with sufficient rapidity, thus presently he received a wound, through his vizor, in the face.

This wound, however, not being serious, the Count paid no attention to it, but presently he was to suffer more seriously.

The Spaniard, who was considerably taller than the Chevalier, raised his arm so as to deliver a point in a downward direction, when Bayard caught his steel on his own blade and, by sheer strength of wrist, for a moment held it so that it remained harmless in the air. Then suddenly disengaging, Bayard, with the speed of lightning, lunged at his opponent's neck. Such was the force of his blow that in spite of the thickness of the Count's gorget the Chevalier's point penetrated the steel and wounded Soto Mayor deeply at the base of the throat.

The success of this stroke, however, merely served to infuriate the Spaniard, who, with a loud cry of rage, dropped his sword and seized Bayard round the body endeavouring to throw him down. The Chevalier likewise threw his sword away, and then was witnessed a terrible struggle for life between the two knights armed only with their daggers.

At length Soto Mayor gained the advantage. Succeeding in clasping both his arms around Pierre de Terrail, he threw him, falling with him, but uppermost.

The struggle now continued on the ground but, for a time, while rolling over one another, in their close embrace, neither was able to use his poniard.

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At length, however, Bayard succeeded in disengaging his right arm, and instantly he struck Soto Mayor a terrible blow, which went home between the nose and the left eye.

The Count dropped his poniard and remained inert, while the panting Chevalier, struggling to his knees, knelt over him, exclaiming: "Yield, Don Alonzo! or you are a dead man!"

The unhappy Soto Mayor made, however, no response to the summons, for he was indeed already dead, the point of Bayard's dagger having penetrated the brain.

Thus ended one of the most famous single combats of the day, leaving Pierre de Terrail victorious, and moreover, although at first exhausted, unwounded.

Loudly the plaudits of the men-at-arms rent the air, for great indeed had been their anxiety for their beloved leader during the long continuance of this ferocious struggle, and so greatly delighted were they at the downfall of the Spanish noble who had so unjustly assailed that leader's honour. Yet, even as L'Allègre removed his master's helmet and unbuckled his cuirass, Bayard, with his usual generosity to a foe, began to lament the enemy whom he had slain.

"Oh! most valorous knight," he exclaimed, "would that thou wert not dead!" while even some of the men-at-arms remarked that truly it was pity that one who had fought so well against the most noted knight in Christendom had not been merely wounded sufficient to punish him for his lying words.

L'Allègre, however, practically suggesting that to delay longer mourning a fallen foe was a mistake, lest his comrades might return, reinforced, to avenge him, Bayard ordered a stretcher to be formed of crossed lances. Saying that he would give his late antagonist a Christian burial, upon this improvised litter, he ordered the body of Alonzo de Soto Mayor to be carried before him into the village of Robecco.

CHAPTER XXVII

HOW BAYARD SAVED AN ARMY

WHILE reading the letter to the Princess Marguerite, expressions of hate and rage swept across the features of the foppish Admiral of France. Absolutely unscrupulous, he had made attempt after attempt to establish himself as the lover of the Duchesse d'Alençon, and although he had been hitherto unsuccessful, had congratulated himself on the fact that if she responded not to him neither did she to any other.

Thus had he lived in hopes of being yet able to win her to his will, if merely because of becoming tired out with his persistency.

In the past it had been the rivalry of the Duc de Bourbon that he had chiefly feared. As for that of Pierre de Terrail, which he had at first suspected, while the manœuvres of Françoise de Châteaubriand had helped to dissipate his suspicions, the fact that after the meeting at Ardres Bayard had apparently ceased to see Marguerite had subsequently completely set Bonnivét's mind at ease.

Now, however, he held, as he imagined, the sole secret of the resistance of the Princess to his dishonourable proposals. She loved this accursed Chevalier, the man who had baffled him when, with the connivance of her brother the King, he had been on the very point of carrying her off to a retreat where she would have been at his mercy.

Oh! how he hated Pierre de Terrail! Yet how

and when had he and the Duchesse d'Alençon again met? for that they must have done so was evident, or whence this intimacy? Taking up the letter again, vainly he sought for a clue—but there he was baffled by Marguerite's circumspection.

Re-reading, however, served but to inflame his fury, which was the more ungovernable owing to his injured pride. Could he have at that moment driven a dagger into the heart of the writer, willingly would he have done so, but he meditated worse for her than that. "On the battlefield as in the ladies' boudoir, as past experience hath shewn, vainly deems himself irresistible!" "Correct this coxcomb!" forsooth! Bonnivet gnashed his teeth at these biting words!

"Ah! Madame," so ran his thoughts, "past experience shall not be future experience, nor with silken ropes but bands of steel shall you be bound next time, while every outrage man can heap on woman shall be your lot! This 'coxcomb' shall so leave you that you will pray for death, your proud spirit broken! Yet shall you not die! nay you shall live to mourn your degradation—to rue the day that thus you set your hand to paper. The Pope's sacred blessings will, methinks, be long in coming!"

There was no sentence in the whole of the letter which aroused the scorn of the Admiral more than the closing phrase. While dwelling on these confiding words from Marguerite to her noble lover he laughed bitterly.

"'She that will be your wife!' Ay, perchance in hell! for thither surely shall she follow Bayard, and there shall he shortly travel! In this place Robecco will I leave him, and truth it is, I know, that Pescara advances, with twenty thousand or more. Yet will he come to-night, and to attack Bayard, for myself will contrive to warn him how he lies here alone and unprotected. Thus shall this most presumptuous bridegroom perish! no more shall I be

troubled by his presence, and then the Admiral's plaything, not de Terrail's bride, shall you be, Marguerite de Valois!"

Having carefully replaced the letter under the pillow, Bonnivet, accompanied by his squire and two pages whom he had left without, strolled down to the entrance of the village, in time to meet the Chevalier and his men-at-arms, slowly returning behind the body of a knight clothed in rich armour. The storm within his black heart surged up anew while beholding the evidence of this new example of Pierre de Terrail's prowess, yet, composing his features, the Admiral enquired, casually,

"Well, Bayard! what have you got there? is that the Spaniard that left without paying his ransoms? 'Twould seem that he hath now paid all his debts in full!"

"Ay, Bonnivet," replied the Chevalier feelingly, "alas! it is the unfortunate Soto Mayor. Would that I had not killed him! for all his faults was he a gentle knight, and fought like a very lion; ours was a pretty combat. Now shall he have Christian burial, although, poor soul! he died unshriven, with all his sins upon him."

"Bury your carrion where you like or burn him if you choose," replied the Admiral rudely, then feeling that he would do better not to provoke Bayard too far, added abruptly, "Well, now I return to lead my army to Milan—you know my plans."

Bayard noticed the insolence in the Admiral's tone, yet, thinking but of France, replied,

"Then will I strike my camp and follow you, for we must act together, Comrade, in the interests of the King."

"The interests of France and the King will, methinks, best be served by your obeying my orders," replied Bonnivet haughtily, "and these are they. Remain in Robecco, and guard the place

well! I require not your presence with me, but march alone."

At this Bayard could contain himself no longer, but flared up with righteous indignation.

"Have you lost your wits, or is there murder in your heart? No friend are you to France or to the King, or would you issue no such foolish, treacherous command. Yet shall you meet me for it face to face! I vow you are a traitor, Seigneur de Bonnivet!"

The Admiral had hitherto displayed no fear of exposing himself in the war, but, with the example of the fate of Alonzo de Soto Mayor before his very eyes, he felt that to meet that noble's victor was another matter. He thought that he would soon be free of Bayard without having to fight him, moreover he wished to live, in order to realise his plans of vengeance where the Princess was concerned. His reply was therefore cold. "When the war is over, I will meet you—your duty now is here!"

Turning to his squire and pages, Bonnivet called: "Gentlemen, my horse!" Without another word, he mounted and rode away, amid the furious looks of those standing by. Indeed, many made motions as though they would strike or shoot the Admiral down, yet were they restrained by the great man whom he had, as was evident to all, of malice aforethought left to his doom. For Bonnivet's last words had been heard by many. A group of officers, chief of whom was De Lorges, who commanded the infantry, now came up to the Chevalier. Their anger was apparent.

"Seigneur!" they exclaimed, "'tis evident the King's favourite wishes us all to be killed since he leaves us here. His black heart is but too well-known—would you have us longer obey him?"

"My friends," replied Bayard—"It is the King whom we must all obey—the Admiral is but his mouthpiece!"

"Yet," interrupted L'Allègre, for once speaking hotly—"is this Admiral no friend to the King, he but leaves us, and you to command us, here as a matter of personal revenge. Did you not, my Seigneur, as all France is well aware, rescue from his vile clutches the King's own sister! Now is he a very murderer, I vow, yet my noble master, would I not say that you, unless forced by numbers, should leave this place. Nay, Comrades," continued the squire, turning to the officers assembled. "Have we a Bayard to command us? and with such a leader what have we to fear? With his example before our eyes we still can do our duty, knowing well that he will not leave us to be killed like rats in a hole, yet when he deems fit, will save us, as many times he has done before, ay, and that in spite of fifty murdering Admirals!"

The officers, headed by De Lorges, rushed up and shook L'Allègre by the hand. His immense confidence in his master had reassured them all. They crowded round their commander in turn, and assured him of their willingness to fight for him to the death.

While Bayard, much moved, was warmly thanking his gallant subordinates for their devotion to himself, he yet was keeping an eye across the river. Suddenly he pointed, when all turned to look, as their commander remarked calmly:

"The Admiral is advancing! he marches on Milan!"

"Advances on Milan! and without us! 'Tis base treachery!"

The Chevalier, to calm this fresh excitement, imposed silence on all, while he watched awhile and then observed.

"I vow, 'tis most unskilful! See, Comrades, he hath no advance-guard—no protecting flanking parties! merely marches in one long straggling line, with all his baggage-waggons mixed up in his ranks."

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"Seigneur," exclaimed De Lorges, "he surely courts disaster!"

"Ay, my good De Lorges," responded Bayard, "the Admiral indeed courts disaster and, am I not mistaken, now will meet it. But have I warned him, and thus will trouble naught about him. Yet let us be on the alert, unless trouble should come our own way. It behoves us now to doubly watch." Turning about, the Chevalier made a sharp exclamation.

"Ay! my friends, 'tis as I thought, see yonder! dust over there to our right!—it may portend an attack in force. I beg you now leave me, gentlemen, to get your troops ready under arms, for we may have a sharp brush presently. Man the earthworks, Comrades! yet let no man advance beyond them without orders, for 'tis likely all will here be needed. Yet behold!" added Bayard, "not one but two large columns of the enemy! there are then more than Pescara, whom alone I expected. One army, and that the lesser, comes this way, while the other travels northward; 'twill doubtless cross the river, to fall on Bonnivet in flank, separate his forces, roll him up ere he can form his front. Well, he will but meet the fate he merits! To your posts my good Officers! Watch well the eastern side, De Lorges, and spare the men as much as possible."

"Ay, Seigneur, trust us, we will do our duty as the officers of Bayard should," replied the Seigneur de Lorges. And then all the officers, saluting, departed to their respective posts, and soon the sound of a hot arquebus fire was heard from the eastern side of the village. Bayard meanwhile remained watching towards the north, with his squire in attendance.

From where they stood it was easy for them to perceive the forces of Bonnivet, straggling along at some distance from the western bank of the river

Ticino, easy to observe, likewise, that they were perfectly unaware of the presence of an advancing foe on the eastern bank. The Chevalier soon pointed out the situation to his squire.

"See, L'Allègre, note yon rising ground that swells on our side the river, how completely it hides the Spaniards from the Admiral's badly organised troops! Moreover Bonnivet, advancing, hath not sent to hold the bridge, which lies all undefended. What tactics in one supposed to command the armies of France! Yet he, foolhardy, is all unconscious of his danger, 'tis lamentable!"

"Ay," returned L'Allègre, "yet 'tis his men I grieve for, who march on thus careless of their danger—yet thousands will fall shortly."

"Squire!" remarked Pierre de Terrail suddenly, with vehemence, "I said that I would let the Admiral meet his fate, yet can I not do it! nay, though he be more mine enemy than the Spaniard."

"Yet what can you do, my master? not a soldier have you to spare, thus Bonnivet, who seeks our death, must surely find his own; nay, not one man can be sent from these earthworks, my Seigneur."

"You are wrong, L'Allègre! One man there is, for Bayard can go! While De Lorges commands here in Robecco, 'tis I will defend that bridge, for well can I hold it single-handed until assistance come, and meanwhile you shall ride to Bonnivet. There yet is time. See, the Spanish troops now halt behind the hilly ground, concealed! they doubtless wait the better to perform their coming work of butchery. Call the varlets with the horses, friend."

L'Allègre was accustomed to the wonderful feats of arms of which his master had shown himself to be capable, but now he simply stared in horrified astonishment, while expostulating: "Defend the bridge alone! 'tis sheer madness, my Seigneur! Why should you thus be slaughtered and all in vain, for one who hath shown himself your bitter

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enemy? Nor will I leave your side if you persist, but remain with you to the last."

"Nay, but you shall not! Together will we swiftly gain the bridge, then, while you ride off to the Admiral, will I raise a barrier in the midst, with the coping stones, which but yesterday I noticed to be loosened. With my back to this, I can keep off as many as come; yet soon will you return to help me. If you find not the Admiral, bring the first men-at-arms you meet with, they will ride swiftly enough, learning the danger!"

"Seigneur! Seigneur! attempt it not! France cannot spare you!"

"No more words, L'Allègre! time is short—the horses! the horses!"

A few minutes later, Bayard and his squire had gained the bridge, a tolerably wide stone structure. While the latter galloped off, his master, fastening his charger to one of the loose coping stones, and working with feverish haste, piled up a barrier of the remainder behind him. His strength was great and the stones large, and, as fortunately, the enemy while resting behind the hills, had not taken the pains to watch the bridge, the Chevalier contrived to raise quite a decent rampart, which if somewhat low yet would prove an obstruction when defended. Resting from his labours, he beheld the Spaniards commencing to ride down towards him. Mounting his horse, Bayard now placed himself with his back to his barrier and, commending himself to God, awaited them, lance in hand.

When the front ranks of the enemy arrived to find one knight alone posted thus in the centre of the bridge, they halted, while their commander, Fernando d'Avalos, Marquis of Pescara, riding forward to survey this madman, summoned him to surrender. As Bayard had discarded his shield, leaving it face downwards behind his barrier, the noble d'Avalos saw no blazoned coat-of-arms by

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which to guide him to the identity of this strange foeman. Accordingly, he called upon him to yield, whoever he might be, or to take the consequences.

Receiving no reply, Pescara retiring, sent forward some of his men-at-arms riding three abreast. No sooner had their front rank set foot on the bridge than Bayard charged upon them furiously. Four men and horses were overthrown by him at first, of whom two of the riders with their horses were hurled into the rapid river over the lowered parapet, and were seen no more. The others served but to retard the advance of their comrades, who, however, now came on in a swarm, only to be received with violent blows from the Chevalier, each of which dealt either death or some serious wound.

In vain was it that the Spaniards endeavoured to force their way past this terrible champion, and at length their leaders, ashamed, rode in personally among their men, to endeavour to overcome the seemingly invincible knight. Among these was the Duc de Bourbon, whom Bayard recognised, as did he Pescara, by his blazon.

These the champion singled out, and, proclaiming his name aloud, rode at them furiously with his sword, his lance having been left sticking in the body of an unfortunate Spaniard, who, transfixed, lay writhing on the roadway, at the entrance to the bridge.

“Ha! Bourbon, traitor! have you left Milan, where you consort with your country’s foes? then take that, to shew the Milanese when you return!”

Accompanying his words, Bayard dealt a sweeping cut, which severed the vizor of the ex-Constable’s helmet and laid the left side of his cheek bare to the bone. As the Duke’s squire pulled his master back out of the throng, Pierre de Terrail found himself opposed by the husband of the lovely Vittoria Colonna. “Ha! Pescara!” he cried, “’tis ages since we met! take this message

to your Emperor from Bayard!" The message consisted in a thrust from his point at the joint between the shoulder and the sword arm, for, even in the heat of this terrible fight, the Chevalier generously thought that he would not send Fernando d'Avalos back, like Bourbon, disfigured to the charming poetess his wife.

As Pescara, having dropped his sword, was in turn pulled back out of the press, others came on, but, fighting, as declared his foes, like a devil not a man, the Chevalier overthrew them all, notwithstanding the fact that both he and his war-horse received several wounds.

Although his courage never slackened, the noble Chevalier commenced to feel his strength failing. He thought of Marguerite and of her letter, which now lay reposed upon his heart. "Never, I vow," exclaimed he inwardly, "was life so dear as now! Yet if I die, 'twill be for France!" And he fought on. He found himself at length forced right back against his barrier, the enemy, by sheer weight of numbers, having gained a firm footing on the bridge—and he could no longer stay them. At this moment, Pierre de Terrail heard a well-known voice behind him: "A Bayard! A Bayard!" and in a moment, jumping his horse over the stone barrier, L'Allègre was by his side.

The gallant squire was just in time to save his beloved Seigneur from a tremendous blow being dealt him by a gigantic Moorish champion in the Spanish ranks. Killing the Moorish knight by a thrust in the neck, with ferocious shouts, L'Allègre spurred his horse forward before his weakening master, whose heroic deeds he emulated.

Just long enough the brave squire held back the foe, and then relief came! A swarm of men-at-arms, whom he had out-galoped, clashed over the barrier in turn, and drove back, pell-mell, the already disheartened Spaniards. More followed—

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the bridge was crossed, and Bayard, forgetting his wounds, joined in the pursuit. Yet a third troop of French men-at-arms now arriving on the scene, L'Allègre, perceiving the Chevalier's armour to be covered with blood, seized his horse by the bridle and pulled his master out of the fray.

As the Frenchmen, in ever increasing numbers, swept on victorious, the Squire led his beloved Seigneur back to the river's brink. There, by the side of the bridge which was encumbered with the dead and dying, the Squire aided Bayard to dismount, and having removed his helmet, tenderly bathed away the blood which was streaming down his face.

The gallant French men-at-arms already were returning, the Spaniards being in full flight, when Bonnivet himself arrived, somewhat late, on the scene.

As all the French officers surrounded and loudly applauded the champion, the Admiral, as in duty bound, advanced also to tender his thanks for his preservation. To have done otherwise would, as well he knew, have been to earn the hatred of all his army.

The Chevalier, who still held his bloody sword, waved him back, exclaiming: "A moment, I beg you excuse me, Admiral, first have I a duty to perform—then will we have speech together."

While all wondered what Bayard was now about to do, he gave an order to his squire.

"Kneel down before me, Armand de L'Allègre!" Unquestioningly the squire obeyed, as Pierre de Terrail raised his sword.

"Most gallant of men, and faithful of squires," said Bayard, "here in the sight of your brave comrades, who have seen how by your deeds you have saved an army to France, receive the reward of your valour!"

Dealing the kneeling man a blow upon the

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shoulder with his bloody weapon, the Chevalier exclaimed, in clear tones :

“ Arise ! Sir Armand de L’Allègre ! for thou art a most noble knight ! ”

As the newly made knight arose, seized and attempted to kiss his master’s hand, the latter dropped his sword, staggered, and fell fainting in his arms.

CHAPTER XXVIII

BAYARD'S LAST BATTLE

SOME months had elapsed since the day of Bayard's marvellous exploits at the bridge, and of Bonnivet's foolish advance on Milan, which had but resulted in his discomfiture. The Chevalier also had long since made a wonderful strategic retreat from Robecco, with the loss of only nine men and an hundred and fifty horses, left behind, upon the occasion of a night attack by Pescara, with about fourteen thousand Spaniards.

He had recovered from his wounds, and now was present with the Admiral's shattered forces, which day by day were being pushed farther and farther back towards the mountains separating Italy from Savoy and France. It seemed but a question of a few days more before Bonnivet, as the result of his ineptitude, would find himself called upon to surrender at discretion to the Imperial forces. He had been compelled to yield up the city of Novara, and now was, in a state of the greatest confusion, upon the banks of the Sesia in Piedmont. To cross this swollen flood there was but one bridge, and, with the enemy harassing his rear, upon this bridge Bonnivet gazed with despair, for while soldiers were slowly retiring over it, it was choked with débris. Around him in all directions lay broken waggons and gun carriages, while the ground was strewn with wounded men.

However the emboldened Spaniards were still being kept back by the brilliantly managed service of a battery of six guns. Among these guns still floated the standards of France, while Pierre de Terrail and his friend Sir Armand de L'Allègre supported them, with some ragged foot soldiers armed with arquebuses and some men-at-arms, whose horses were but skeletons and their accoutrements as tattered as themselves.

Bonnivet had recently been wounded by a ball and, as the pain of his wounded arm added to his wretchedness, he completely lost all semblance of courage. Thus, while surveying the scene, was he mentally exclaiming: "The enemy push hotly on, we shall be driven into the river, our guns and standards will be lost, as is all Lombardy to France already! Should but the foe cross that bridge behind us ere I can gain the hills, the army must be destroyed or surrender! Then gone for ever will be my favour with the King!"

Feeling himself almost distracted, the Admiral cried weakly to a group of officers who, mutinously, were seated near while exerting themselves no longer. "What can we do, gentlemen? how save ourselves?"

"That," answered one of them disrespectfully, "is for you to decide. You, by your tactics, led us into this butchery, and had therefore better get us out of it or resign the command to one more capable than yourself!"

At this remark the other officers, and even some of the soldiers near, laughed with scornful approval, whereupon, Bonnivet, livid with rage, replied,

"Mutinous dog! you shall be hanged for that remark, after the war!"

"You are like enough to end the war by being hanged yourself, by Bourbon," sneered the officer. "For when he catches you, as catch you he will ere sundown, he will not forget how you it was who

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instigated Madame Louise and the King to bring against him the lawsuit which deprived him of his seven provinces."

"Ay," cut in another officer. "You it was, as all know, who drove him to rebel and he, our ablest General, has by you been driven to the Spaniards! Had but Bourbon been here now on our side, instead of you, 'twould be a better shewing we should have made before them!"

"My comrades are right," interposed a third, "there is this comfort for us in our misery, that your neck will be surely stretched before to-morrow by him that was the Constable of France. While dying ourselves, we can at any rate feel that satisfaction!"

"Cease your insolence," responded Bonnivet, "or I will have you all shot this moment, go hence and assist to clear away that block at the bridge!"

As the officers, who were in rags and shoeless, and moreover, so fatigued that scarce could they move, crawled off towards the bridge, their disconsolate commander more fully than ever realised the hopelessness of his situation.

"Those ruffians speak the truth! I shall indeed feel Bourbon's bitter vengeance, should he take me!"

"Yet how to escape? resign my command, they say! Ay, there lies the door of safety. To Bayard will I hand it over. Then should great disaster terminate the war, on him, not me, will fall the King's displeasure.

"First will I reach the Royal ear, to throw all blame on this hated Pierre de Terrail, thus will my favour fast endure!"

The better to carry out his plot, the Admiral now threw himself on the ground. While groaning as if in agony, he beckoned to an officer who was but coldly surveying his prostrate commander.

"What ails you, General?" this one enquired casually.

"Friend, my shoulder blade is shattered into pieces. It burns and throbs with anguish so great I fear to lose my reason. I pray you, fetch me the Captain Bayard quickly hither."

Delighted at the idea that possibly there might be a change of commander, the officer hurried on his mission; and shortly the Chevalier stood by the side of the wounded Admiral.

Surveying his old enemy with a kindly eye, Bayard observed: "You send for me, Bonnivet, and thus I come, though ill can I be spared from the rearguard. You suffer, and I grieve to see your pain."

While the Admiral continued to moan grievously, Pierre de Terrail leaned over to make an examination of the injury. Presently he said cheerfully:

"Come, cheer up, Comrade, this wound is not so serious. Be manly! in this sad plight the army needs your brave example, requires your orders. I will aid you to rise, your legs and body are uninjured."

"Nay, Bayard, my sufferings are awful, the ball hath lodged within the bone, no orders can I give, my brain's afire! I must be carried now across the bridge, give up the command. To you I yield my rank as General. I beg you save for France the guns and standards! protect our crossing!"

"Take over the command at this late hour! save the guns and standards, which you would leave! cover the crossing!" With withering scorn the Chevalier uttered these words.

"Ay, Bayard, in you have I the greatest confidence, upon your skill and bravery must France and the King depend. I will report your prowess, gain you much favour at the Court."

Pierre de Terrail laughed bitterly. "Strange, Bonnivet, at this moment to declare your confidence in Bayard, whom you have hated, to whose counsels have you ever turned an ear as deaf as

stone, or had we not been in this sorry plight to-day. Little cares he for favour at the Court, and none so it depend on praises of a Bonnivet! Would you resign your command, when a brave man had held it? Choose then not Bayard but some trusted friend to wear your mantle. Yet act quickly! Pescara presses! Bourbon's banner floats behind him!"

The mention of the brave if rebellious Charles de Bourbon, whom he had indeed greatly injured, filled the Admiral with terror. Unaided, he swiftly raised himself from his recumbent posture, while addressing Bayard in tones in which the fear was evident.

"Bourbon! that accursed Constable, at hand! Bayard, none but you can oppose him! Comrade, would you bear rancour in this moment, to have me fall alive into his power? I vow, Bayard, that in my heart have I loved you from the day that by your single bravery you saved me at the bridge near Milan. Have I not listened to your counsels as I should, I crave forgiveness of my folly—'twas caused by jealous fancies, love of woman; the Princess Marguerite loves you!"

While the piteous pleading of the Admiral filled his hearer but with contempt, his mention of Marguerite raised his anger.

"Name not, Bonnivet, her whom you so foully wronged, or scant will be my help to save you from Bourbon's vengeance. Yet will I try to save the men whom you abandon—the guns, the standards too, will but these broken troops stand. And you shall save your skin, maybe your favour at the Court as well!"

Turning to the disorganised troops crowding towards the bridge, the Chevalier cried loudly.

"Officers! soldiers! will you have Bayard for your commander? Will you obey him?"

At the mere offer to command them, the poor, disorganised rabble near at hand raised a joyous

cry of "A Bayard! A Bayard!"—there was no doubt as to whether they were willing or no!

Those also who had crossed the bridge took up the cry, those likewise who, jammed up together, among the broken carts and gun carriages were waiting to cross. The cry spread to the fighting line with L'Allègre and De Lorges—to the artillery men with the guns. As a very pæan of victory, the air rang with a shout which made the earth tremble: "A Bayard! A Bayard!" In every eye shone a new light, courage took the place of despair. From a flock of sheep the broken troops became an army once more. The Spaniards heard the shout, and faltered.

Wasting no more time over Bonnivet, whom quickly, and with scant courtesy, he sent off to the rear, the noble Chevalier began instantly to instil order among those whom he had already animated with courage. Ranks were reformed, parties of arquebus-men sent out to line the banks to right and left of the bridge upon the other side of the river, so as to cover the retirement with their fire, charges were made beyond the guns, the Spaniards rolled back!

As, under the supervision of Sir Armand de L'Allègre, the wounded were now all carefully carried across and taken to a position which Bayard had ordered the troops to occupy on the hillside across the river, quite a different face appeared on matters to that of but an hour before. Now was there no more grumbling, not a mutinous look was to be seen, while every man did his duty nobly, in his confidence in his new commander.

Thus everything worked like a charm, and, while Bayard sent the Seigneur de Lorges to assume the command of the troops already occupying a good defensive position on the hills, he himself remained upon the side where was the greater danger.

L'Allègre remained also, and when, at length, all

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of the wounded had been passed over the bridge to the rear, he came up respectfully to report that fact, while saluting his former master, who was now his intimate friend.

"My Seigneur," said L'Allègre, for never would he give up the old and time-honoured appellation, "now I remain with you, for that which is yet to be done. For well I know," he added, "that on this side the Sesia will you remain to see it all out, and trust to none other, and further I observe that the Spaniards are once more hotly pressing forward."

"Give me your hand, L'Allègre!" quoth Bayard, with a rough tenderness in his voice. Looking deep into one another's eyes, these two brave men stood thus for a moment. They were silent, yet what a wealth of words and memories was conveyed in their silence!

Dropping, as if reluctantly, his friend's hand, presently the Chevalier spoke. "Now for it, L'Allègre! we have got to make a final charge, ay, one to be pressed home well beyond the guns, and then to make a stand while the standards and the guns are retired. We must hold them well back, friend, yet, think you, will our men-at-arms be able to do it? Remember this may be our last charge, L'Allègre, but, as many a former, we shall make it together!"

"Ay, my Seigneur, our men-at-arms are not as those who have been under the Admiral's command. Not one of them is there but would glory to die by our side! Were they not at Robecco!" continued L'Allègre with enthusiasm, "and did not they there see you hold the bridge single-handed against thousands?"

"Tush, Comrade!" answered Bayard, but nevertheless a tear sprung to his eye as, mounting their horses, the friends rode forward to the fighting line.

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The standards and the guns had been taken safely over the bridge, and, slowly falling back after them, while still facing the foe, Bayard had sent back in succession section after section of his men-at-arms, of whom the ranks had been sadly thinned, by the arquebus fire and lances of the Spaniards.

At length he and L'Allègre, with but a small party, alone remained in front of the bridge to protect it.

His former squire was most jubilant.

"My Seigneur! nobly this day have you upheld the tarnished glory of France, now under your command shall we be once more victorious! Soon shall we recross this rushing, muddy stream, and the name of Bayard will be undying. We now have but to withdraw this remaining section. The engineers have made ready, we will blow up the bridge and snap our fingers at Bourbon and Pescara. Oh! great will be your praises!"

"The praise is due to God, my trusty friend, not to man! All is in his hands, or life or death! Fall back, my men," added Bayard to the last detachment of his gallant men-at-arms. "When the match of the mine is in place and lighted, give a signal, call out the words France! France! then will I follow you. Go likewise, L'Allègre."

"Nay, nay," replied L'Allègre laughing. "This is not the bridge of the Ticino, and therefore go I not until you go, my Seigneur. No longer am I now your squire, that thus you would order me. Yet methinks, squire or no, it were near time that I took your horse by the bridle rein, to turn its head, as once near Milan, for long enough hath Bayard tempted Providence!"

"Stay then a minute, and you will not obey orders," responded Bayard in cheery tones, "moreover, the Spanish fire slackens, almost ceases! what the reason?" The Chevalier shaded his eyes with his hand, peering into the distance. "Strange! most strange! behold a Cardinal with two hooded

ladies, mounted on mules! With difficulty they pick their way among the dead and dying! Saw ever you the like, L'Allègre, upon a battlefield?"

"My Seigneur, 'tis most wonderful! A Cardinal, in crimson hat and full canonicals, and with him women in long cloaks of russet brown. Methinks, that 'tis some Papal Nuncio upon a mission, and with him Abbesses? Yet know I not, for never saw I the like in scenes of furious war."

"'Tis this way they come, L'Allègre, mayhap His Eminence would pass the bridge, seeking to gain Savoy? Well, we will aid him with our escort."

"Nay, but they are not Abbesses," answered L'Allègre, irrelevantly. "By Saint Michael! I know the shape of the little one. I would vow I have seen her before, in peace or war. Hark, my Seigneur, the Cardinal cries out! for the unmannerly dogs of Spaniards have recommenced their firing. List to His Eminence's words above the din."

In spite of the desultory arquebus fire of the troops under Pescara, it was easy now to hear the Cardinal loudly crying, while traversing their ranks:

"Safe conduct! Safe conduct! I come from the Holy Father, on a mission of peace!"

"A mission of peace! Give thanks to God, L'Allègre, so that the terms be honourable to France and can be listened to. Yet do the irreligious troops of Charles the Emperor not heed him—the fire grows hotter than ever."

"Ay, a few more such volleys, my Seigneur, and I doubt if ever we cross that bridge, yet can we not leave this spot until that match be ready—but are they full long about it!"

"Behold! now they dismount!" continued L'Allègre, forgetting the balls sputtering around him in his interest in the strange group—"And mark the little lady, 'tis most strange! she seizes the trumpet of him that holds her mule, ay, and raises it to her lips, my Seigneur!"

Even as he spoke, the trumpet call to "cease firing" was heard to ring out in most discordant fashion, and twice repeated.

"Said I not well that I knew her?" exclaimed Sir Armand de L'Allègre excitedly—"of a surety 'tis Anne Boleyn! I would say Fleurange's little trumpeter! Ay, and they heed her trumpet call, 'tis wonderful! the firing is almost stayed."

"Mark you the lady with her!" now cried Bayard in agitated tones. "She hath thrown back her hood, L'Allègre. Ye blessed saints above! it is the Princess Marguerite!"

Even as Bayard uttered these words, more shots were heard from Spaniards who had disregarded the trumpet call.

Throwing off her cloak to be able to run the faster, and rushing across the intervening space, Marguerite de Valois was now seen waving a paper, while crying, "Bayard! You live! God be praised! We bring the Papal dispensation."

"Keep back," he cried—"keep back, Marguerite! the bullets!"

"Not all the bullets on earth shall keep me from you!" cried Marguerite in turn. She had almost reached Bayard when a ball struck him in the chest—and he fell!

"Alas!" he exclaimed, as the Princess wildly threw her arms around him, "but one bullet hath, I fear, for ever kept me from you — my Marguerite!"

At the same moment Bayard struggled to his feet, and, turning to L'Allègre, said calmly:

"Set me down, friend, with my back to yonder tree and my face to the enemy—'tis thus would Bayard die!"

As L'Allègre and the Princess aided the noble Chevalier and placed him as he desired, all the firing ceased. It had been the last shot which had stricken Bayard down!

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Now the officer Du Bellay and several men came running to the fallen hero from across the bridge.

"General!" they cried, "the match is lighted, we can carry you across!"

"Nay, Du Bellay, leave me! retire instantly, blow up the arch! save the army! this is my resting-place! Retire also, L'Allègre, dear friend!"

All left save L'Allègre, and scarcely had they reached the other side of the river when a dull explosion was heard. The arch next to the farther shore was destroyed, and the safety of the French army secured.

The Cardinal, who had been in conversation with some Spanish officers, now came to join Marguerite by the side of the fallen Bayard.

Marguerite kissed her lover tenderly on the face. "My beloved," she said in heart-broken tones which belied the hopes her words expressed, "this wound may not be mortal. I am free and may be your bride! The Holy Father's Nuncio even now will make us one before heaven! Cardinal! hear us pledge our vows!"

While placing his hand feebly in that of the Princess, Bayard sadly shook his head. "Too late! my Marguerite, too late! God hath willed it otherwise, my moments on earth are numbered. But oh! that I should leave you sorrowing!"

While Marguerite fell back in a paroxysm of weeping, the Cardinal, on his knees beside Bayard, gently said that he would hear him confess and shrive him. As the Nuncio listened to the whispered words of the dying man, Marguerite knelt between Anne Boleyn and L'Allègre, with hands joined in prayer. A bevy of great Spanish captains, who had also approached, likewise knelt reverently at a little distance.

Presently the Cardinal rose, and, spreading his hands out over the noble Bayard, pronounced the following words. "God absolve thee, my son, for in

thy pure soul I find no sin requiring priestly absolution !”

The Marquis de Pescara, the Duc de Bourbon, and other captains now advanced, bareheaded. Pescara placed himself by Bayard's side on his knees, and made a touching speech to one who had been his enemy. “Would to God, Monsieur de Bayard, that I could have given sufficient of my blood to nourish you, and save you as my prisoner in perfect health, then should you soon learn how greatly I have ever held you in esteem, most noble foe !”

To this the Chevalier responded. “Greatly I thank you for your courtesy. Death removes earthly enmities ! My noble Marquis, it hath ever been an honour to have you as opponent. I grieve that I wounded you at the bridge.” The two great commanders clasped hands, while the tears coursed down the cheeks of Fernando d'Avalos.

The Duc de Bourbon now advanced, seeking to make his peace with one whom he, above all others, had cause to honour.

“Alas ! Monsieur de Bayard ! I grieve greatly to see you thus ! you who were such a virtuous knight !”

Bayard looked reprovingly upon this great Prince. “Monseigneur, I thank you, yet is there no cause to pity me. I die as an honourable man, serving my King. Rather are you to be pitied, who carry arms against your Prince, your country, and your oath !”

In silence, and with head bowed down, Bourbon retired.

While the Cardinal held high a crucifix before Bayard's placid eyes, the Spanish captains fell back reverentially as L'Allègre once more led the Princess to his side. They knelt while, with infinite tenderness, Marguerite supported him in her arms.

For a space Pierre de Terrail gazed upon his loved one's face while saying no word. A radiance as of heaven illumined Bayard's war-worn features as,

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summoning his fast expiring strength, he made a final effort.

“My Marguerite! I die happy in your love, conscious of having done my duty to France, and in the peace of God!”

Bayard continued to gaze into her eyes, and then, gradually, a change came over his own.

Slowly the great warrior fell backwards, while, L'Allègre aiding, they placed him upon his mother earth.

Marguerite rose wildly to her feet, picked up the Papal dispensation of divorce, and then, mechanically, tore it across. The pieces fluttered listlessly to the ground! She threw herself across the body of her hero, then suddenly raised her face and her hands to heaven.

“May God have mercy on his noble soul! As hath my Bayard lived, so hath he died—sans peur et sans reproche!”

THE END

